IDENTITY in CONFLICT

The Struggle between Esau and Jacob, Edom and Israel

Elie Assis

SIPHRUT 19
Literature and Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures

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Identity in Conflict

Siphrut
Literature and Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures

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Identity in Conflict

The Struggle between Esau and Jacob, Edom and Israel

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Abbreviations

General

E	Elohistic source
J	Jahwistic source
P	Priestly source
R	redactor

Reference Works

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	Freedman, D. N., editor. *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*. 6 vols. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1992
AJSL	*American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*
ANET	Pritchard, J.B. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*. 3rd ed.. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969
ATD	Das Alte Testament Deutsch
BASOR	*Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*
BHS	Biblica Hebraica Stuttgartensia
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar Altas Testament
BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament
BWAT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten Testament
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CB	Century Bible
CBC	Cambridge Bible Commentary
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
HUCA	*Hebrew Union College Annual*
HKAT	Handkommentar zum Alten Testament
IB	Buttrick, G. A., et al., editors. *Interpreter's Bible*. 12 vols. New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1951–57
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IEJ	*Israel Exploration Journal*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JHS	*Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*
JJS	*Journal of Jewish Studies*
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JQR	*Jewish Quarterly Review*
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplements
JSS	*Journal of Jewish Studies*
JST n.s.	*The Journal of Theological Studies*, new series
KAT	Kommentar zum Alten Testament

KHAT	Kurzer Handkommentar zum Alten Testament
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
NCBC	New Century Bible Commentary
NIB	*New Interpreter's Bible*
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
OTG	Old Testament Guides
OTL	Old Testament Library
PEQ	*Palestine Exploration Quarterly*
RB	*Review biblique*
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
TDOT	Botterweck, G. J., and Ringgren, H., editors. *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974–2006
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*

Introduction

No nation has been subjected to a wider range of biblical attitudes and emotions than Edom. In some sources, Edom is perceived as Israel's brother; in many others, the animosity toward Edom is tremendous. The book of Genesis introduces Isaac, his wife Rebecca, and their twin sons, Esau and Jacob. Rivalry between the brothers emerges even before their birth, and escalates over the course of their lives. The question of which son should be favored also causes tension in the parents' relationship, and most of the Genesis text concerning Isaac and Rebecca revolves around this issue. The narrative describes the fraternal conflict between Jacob and Esau at length, and many hold that this description is a reflection of the hostility between Edom and Israel. However, the relationship between the brothers is not always depicted as strained.[1] Upon returning to his homeland after a long absence, Jacob greatly fears reunion with his brother Esau, but Esau demonstrates fraternal love and brotherhood toward him, shattering the expectations of both Jacob and the reader. The twins also bury their father Isaac together, without any show of rivalry during or after this event, despite Esau's scheme when Jacob steals the blessing his father intended for him: "Esau said to himself, 'The days of mourning for my father are approaching; then I will kill my brother Jacob'" (Gen 27:41). Esau never executes this plan, as though the text wishes to show that his anger dissipates during Jacob's long stay in Haran; there is no expression of Esau's animosity toward Jacob or Jacob's toward Esau.

The twofold relationship between the brothers in Genesis—brotherhood and fraternity coupled with hatred and rivalry—introduces a dichotomy that is retained throughout the Hebrew Bible. The law in Deuteronomy prohibits hatred of the Edomite because Edom is considered Israel's brother: "You shall not abhor any of the Edomites, for they are your kin" (23:8). The attitude reflected in this deuteronomic law is given practical expression in the description of Israel's encounter with Edom during their journey to Canaan. Numbers 20:14–21 describes how Moses sends messengers to Edom, requesting permission to pass through their borders. Israel's request begins with the expression "Thus says your brother Israel" (v. 14). Edom does not reciprocate this fraternity, however; on the contrary, Israel is driven away with a threat of war. The theme of brotherhood is even more explicit in this episode's version in Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy

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1. See also F. A. Spina, "The 'Face of God': Esau in Canonical Context," in *The Quest for Context and Meaning: Studies in Biblical Intertextuality in Honor of James A. Sanders*, ed. C. A. Evans and S. Talmon (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 3–25.

2:3–6 recounts how God warns Israel not to provoke them; they will not inherit the land of Edom, for it has been bequeathed to Esau. This implies that if Israel initiates war, God will not help them vanquish Edom. Moses relates that this episode concluded with Israel's retreat, once again using an expression of brotherhood: "So we passed by *our kin*, the descendants of Esau who live in Seir" (2:8).

On the other hand, a deeply negative attitude—even hatred—toward Edom is also evident, chiefly in prophetic literature. While prophecies of doom against the nations are prevalent in the Bible, the intensity of anti-Edomite statements seems relatively high in comparison to biblical sources against other nations, and proclamations of hatred against Edom are especially strong. Intense, bitter animosity is expressed in the sharp words of the prophet Malachi (1:2–3):

> I have loved you, says the Lord. But you say, "How have you loved us?" Is not Esau Jacob's brother? says the Lord. Yet I have loved Jacob, but I have hated Esau; I have made his hill country a desolation and his heritage a desert for jackals.

This animosity was not forgotten after the nation was exiled from its land (Ps 137:7):

> Remember, O Lord, against the Edomites, the day of Jerusalem's fall,
> How they said, "Tear it down! Tear it down! Down to its foundations!"

And the lust for revenge against Edom was intertwined with the nation's hope for salvation (Lam 4:21–22):

> Rejoice and be glad, O daughter Edom, you that live in the land of Uz;
> But to you also the cup shall pass; you shall become drunk and strip yourself bare.
> The punishment of your iniquity, O daughter Zion, is accomplished, He will keep you in exile no longer;
> But your iniquity, O daughter Edom, he will punish, He will uncover your sins.

The purpose of this monograph is to elucidate the complex relationship between Edom and Israel reflected in the Bible, to attempt to clarify the source of this complexity and the function that this relationship serves in the various biblical texts and Israel's early history. I aim to show how this relationship plays an important role in the formation of Israel's identity and how the historical interaction between the nations influenced the people's theological conception, as reflected in prophetic literature, poetry, and biblical narrative. In this work, I will address Bartlett's apt, intriguing observation:[2]

2. J. R. Bartlett, *Edom and the Edomites*, JSOTSup 77 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 186.

> It is remarkable that such a small, remote and unsuccessful nation [Edom] should have had such a deep psychological effect upon its former masters [Judah].

Edom is an unwavering presence throughout Judean history, from the dawn of its existence to Judah's final days as an independent, sovereign state in the sixth century B.C.E. In this study, I attempt to reveal what Edom signified to Israel and the role it played in the biblical Israelite consciousness.

This monograph is concerned with the text of the Hebrew Bible, not with actual historical facts.[3] Von Rad states in his commentary on Genesis:

> Our knowledge about Edom rests upon Israelite sources only. If this nation had not a neighbor with such an attentive eye for all the movements of history, a neighbor who could, as these lists show, look with a lively interest at the politics and history of its environment, then hardly the name of Edom would have been preserved.[4]

Edom plays a central role in many biblical sources, and the objective of this work is to examine the Bible's treatment of Edom. Archeological findings and historical facts can undoubtedly contribute to greater understanding of these biblical sources. It is certainly difficult to understand a biblical source fully without knowing what historical period it reflects, and the historical information at our disposal may therefore be vital. If we understand Edom and Israel's history, we can then return to the biblical text with a greater understanding of when each text was compiled. These external sources may illuminate the underlying theological conceptions of the biblical texts and the people's understanding of themselves and in relation to Edom. I believe that understanding Israel's relationship with Edom and this relationship's contribution to the formation of national identity is of crucial historical significance. An exploration of this kind can lead to a profound understanding of the course of history, which is no less important than understanding specific events in history and, in my opinion, even more so.

This monograph opens with an analysis of the Jacob and Esau narratives in the book of Genesis. The struggles between Jacob and Esau, as depicted in Genesis, serve as preliminary background for the nations' joint biblical history, as well as for the anti-Edomite prophecies scattered throughout the prophetic writings. The twins' shaky fraternal bond is a blueprint for the relationships between the nations, who share common origins and certain similarities. Many biblical texts relate to Edom as Israel's brother, and therefore seem to be relying on earlier information. This information is reflected in the genesis narratives of Genesis, though admittedly we have no way of knowing which sources stood at the disposal of the biblical authors who

3. Recent years have seen a growing interest in Edomite history, particularly archaeology. See, for example, P. Beinkowski, ed., *Early Edom and Moab: The Beginning of the Iron Age in Southern Jordan*, Sheffield Archaeological Monographs 7 (Sheffield: Collins, 1992).

4. G. von Rad, *Genesis*, trans. J. H. Marks, OTL (London: SCM, 1961), 340.

referred to Edom. The historical perspective of the Genesis narrative is already established at the beginning of the tale, when in answer to Rebecca's inquiry regarding her difficult pregnancy, God replies: "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples born of you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger" (25:23). The suffering of Rebecca, mother of Jacob and Esau, is interpreted as the beginning of a great struggle between the twins she will bear, a struggle that reflects the tension that will transpire between their descendants, the nations of Israel and Edom. This historical perspective crops up throughout the Genesis narrative, in the brothers' struggle over the birthright, and concludes with Esau's settlement in the land of Edom and Jacob's return to the land of his fathers. Genesis 35, which describes Edom's genealogy, reinforces the paradigm that Jacob and Esau's story in Genesis serves as the basis for Judah and Edom's relationship as portrayed in the Bible.

While we cannot know precisely which materials lay at the disposal of the biblical authors engaging with Edom, it can be assumed that even if they did not have access to the Genesis text, they were certainly familiar with the story of Jacob and Esau in oral form, or even, perhaps, other forms. The working hypothesis of this study is that the audiences of the various oracles about Edom were acquainted, more or less, with the story reflected in Genesis. It thereby follows that these audiences perceived the military and political skirmishes between Judah and Edom in relation to the patriarchal narratives in the book of Genesis. These narratives may have motivated certain historical processes, and different events were undoubtedly interpreted in light of the rudimentary legends in Genesis. Consequently, a careful analysis of the Genesis narrative serves as an indispensable key to unlocking the design and meaning of the other biblical sources that feature Edom.

Once again, the purpose of this exploration is to reveal the spectrum of Israel's attitudes toward Edom and Judah's grasp of historical junctures between the nations, in light of Israel's perception that Edom is descended from Esau, the twin of Jacob, Israel's ancestor. These interpretations were born of the fusion of the nation's experience of reality with their preconceptions of Edom. A careful examination of the prophecies diffused throughout the Bible reveals how the prophets and their audiences apprehended Edom, how they interpreted the events that befell them, and how this mindset was influenced by their grasp of the manifestation of Jacob and Esau's brotherhood. An exploration of the prophetic perspectives of different historical events has the power to reveal the shifting emotional and spiritual world of the people in relation to the complex affinity between Israel and Edom over the course of history.

The brotherhood between Jacob and Esau is characterized by positive emotions as well as rivalry and antagonism. I will show that deep antipathy toward Edom reared its head after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E.

After the destruction, which the people read as a manifestation of God's rejection of Israel, Judah feared that the Edomites served as an alternative as God's chosen nation. This possibility was based on the notion that Edom was descended from Jacob's twin.

A comprehensive discussion and analysis of the sources engaging with Edom will reveal different facets of the complex relationship between the two nations. Sources preceding the destruction display both positive sentiment toward Edom, affirming their kinship, and tension between them, aptly reflecting the strained fraternity between ancestors Jacob and Esau. Jeremiah 49, for example, which can be dated to the period before the destruction, does not convey especial hostility. Nonetheless, the ostensibly typical oracle conceals both positive and negative hints of Edom's fraternity, subtly distinguishing Jeremiah's attitude toward Edom from his reproach of other enemy nations. Sources compiled after Jerusalem's destruction and Judah's exile in 586 B.C.E. display a marked rise in acerbity toward Edom, as is evident in Ezek 25:12–14, Lam 4:21–22, and other sources. Following the destruction, as I will discuss in depth below, the nation believed that they were no longer considered God's chosen nation. Distanced from their homeland, they feared that Edom had been chosen in their place, given that they were descended from Esau, Jacob's twin who had once been rejected by God. Through this lens, a typical political conflict between neighboring nations became a loaded, painful animosity that undermined their very identity as a nation. Thus, following 586 B.C.E., the story of Jacob and Esau's conflict became an integral part of the conflict between the nations. Given this perception, Israel's prophets encouraged the nation that they were still God's chosen people by undermining their alleged competitors, Edom. The Edomite settlement of Judah's land exacerbated the people's fears that Edom had supplanted Israel as God's chosen people; the stronger the Edomite grip on the land, the more caustic and damnatory the prophets riled against them. In parallel, as Israel's sense of identity was undermined, the rejection of Edom grew more relevant. Therefore, many visions of Israel's redemption go hand in hand with predictions of Edom's destruction.

A meticulous study of different oracles will reveal the unique attitude toward Edom, on the one hand, as well as the question of the people's identity, on the other. The particular circumstances of each given historical situation dictate a different attitude toward Edom. Each prophecy, and its specific condemnation of Edom, illuminates precisely how the prophet sought to console the people and promise its looming salvation. Each source exposes different tactics the prophets and poets implemented in order to strengthen the people's sense of identity. The analyses of the different sources explored in this study aspire to present a full and complete picture of Israel's shifting attitudes toward Edom. By tracing the implications of the words of Israel's prophets over the course of history, and by piecing

the meanings of these texts together, a mirror emerges: a mirror reflecting Israel's kaleidoscopic sense of self, forged by the nation's relationship with its surroundings, with God, and with the passage of time.

Chapter 1

"Esau Jacob's Brother": Israel and Edom Are Brothers

Introduction

The biblical story of Edom and Israel begins with the founding fathers of each nation: Esau and Jacob.[1] The narrative opens with their mother Rebecca's twin pregnancy and birth and revolves entirely around the motif that Esau and Jacob are brothers. Rivalry between them begins in their mother's womb and continues during their birth. The narrative implies that their in-utero conflict is a struggle to be born first; the biblical narrator recounts how Esau emerges with Jacob clutching his brother's heel as he leaves his mother's womb. The text differentiates between the brothers as they mature: "Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, living in tents" (Gen 25:27). Competition between them mounts over the course of the narrative: Jacob demands that a ravenous Esau sell him the birthright in exchange for a mess of lentils; Rebecca and Jacob hatch a plot to trick Isaac into blessing Jacob, although Isaac favors Esau and suspects that Jacob is deceiving him. Significantly, the chapters in Genesis contain the word אח, "brother," 23 times, emphasizing the relationship between Jacob and Esau. Edom and Israel's brotherhood is also

1. Scholars are divided as to when Edom became identified with Esau. In the opinion of Noth, von Rad, Otto, and many others, the Edomite element in the book of Genesis is late. M. Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions*, trans. W. Anderson (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972), 95; 192–93; E. Otto, *Jakob in Sichem: Überlieferungsgeschichtliche, archäologisce und territorialgesschichtliche Studien zur Entstehungsgeschichte Israels*, BWANT 110 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1979), 25–27. Many hold that this association was made in the monarchic period, including Bartlett, *Edom and the Edomites*, 180. Blank, who holds this opinion, is convinced that this was only incorporated into biblical sources in the postexilic period: S. H. Blank, "Studies in Post-exilic Universalism," *HUCA* 11 (1936): 175–83. In contrast, others, including Bartlett, are convinced that the association with Seir is earlier and originally associated with Esau. In their opinion, Esau settled to the west of the Arabah, and with Edomite invasions of the west, Judah identified Esau/ Seir with Edom. J. R. Bartlett, "The Land of Seir and the Brotherhood of Edom," *JTS* n.s. 20 (1969): 1–20; idem, *Edom and the Edomites*, 41–44, 175–80. Blum disagrees with these directions and holds that the Edomite element in the story is original. E. Blum, *Die Komposition der Vätergeschichte*, WMANT 57 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1984), 69–78. For his estimation of the story's compilation period, see "The Jacob Tradition," in *The Book of Genesis: Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*, ed. C. A. Evans et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 181–211.

mentioned in other places, among them Num 20:14; Deut 2:4, 8; Amos 1:11; Obad 12, and Mal 1:2.[2] In what sense, however, can Edom and Israel be considered brothers? The prevalent view in research is that the relationship between the neighboring countries is what lies behind the notion that the nations descended from twin brothers. Scholars who favor this view argue that the rivalry between the twins is a reflection of the rivalry between the nations at a later period.[3] This explanation, however, does not

2. Dicou claims that Esau in Genesis represents all the nations that were not chosen by God. He fails, however, to support this claim with any textual evidence. B. Dicou, *Edom, Israel's Brother and Antagonist: The Role of Edom in Biblical Prophecy and Story*, JSOTSup 169 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 126–36.

3. For example: H. Gunkel, *Genesis*, trans. M. E. Biddle, Mercer Library of Biblical Studies (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), 288–91; J. Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1910), 386, 375; S. L. Driver, *The Book of Genesis* (London: Methuen, 1920), 245, and he writes on p. 247: "In v. 23 it is important to bear in mind that the reference is really not to two individuals, as such, but to two *nations*; and the future which the verse holds out in prospect is the future not of Jacob and Esau but *Israel* and *Edom*." In Bartlett's opinion, the problematic relations between neighboring nations resulted in the concept of Edom and Israel as twin nations experiencing sibling rivalry (*Edom and the Edomites*, 179). In his opinion, there should be distinction between Judah and Israel regarding the perception of brotherly relations with Edom, and he holds that the idea that Edom and Israel are brothers was formed in the period after the kingdom of Judah split after Solomon's time, when Judah was at odds with both Edom and Israel—a common struggle that created "brotherly" political relations between Edom and Israel (idem, "The Land of Seir," 13–14). The concept of brotherhood between Edom and Judah was formed through different circumstances. In his opinion, Esau originally dwelled in Seir, which was west of the Arabah, and when the Edomites spread out to the Arabah itself, the Edomites became identified with the figure of Esau (ibid., 15–18). The Edomite invasion of the Arabah recalled the figure of Esau in Genesis (idem, *Edom and the Edomites*, 179). Today, scholars shy away from full correlation between the story in Genesis and the description of the relationship between the nations in the rest of the Bible; see T. L. Thompson, "Conflict Themes in the Jacob Narrative," *Semeia* 15 (1979): 15; Spina, "The Face of God," 4. Fishbane is convinced that the word *brother* is part of the terminology of a covenant, and it therefore reflects the political relations between Judah and Edom in the period of David and Solomon. M. Fishbane, "The Treaty Background of Amos 1:11 and Related Matters," *JBL* 89 (1970): 313–18; Kellermann believes that the motif of "brothers" in Amos 1:10–11 and Obadiah 10 reflects the treaty between the Edomites and Judah against the Babylonians. The Edomites broke this treaty and joined the Babylonians against Judah. However, the motif "brother" is found in texts that definitely predate this covenant. U. Kellermann, *Israel und Edom: Studien zum Edomhass Israels im 6–4 Jahrhundert v. Chr.* (Münster: Westf, 1975), 14–15. Regarding the expression "brother" in political relationships between nations, see J. Priest, "The Covenant Brothers," *JBL* 84 (1965): 400–406. Ben Zvi holds that Edom is a symbol of all the nations and is convinced that the term *brother* symbolizes Israel's being chosen from among the nations. E. Ben Zvi, *A Historical-Critical Study of the Book of Obadiah*, BZAW 242 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1996), 240–43. Waterman claims that Israel originates from Edom: L. Waterman, "Jacob the Forgotten Supplanter," *AJSL* 55 (1938): 25–43. Recently, Tebes has explained that the idea of brotherhood with Edom developed from the Edomite infiltration of the Negev between the end of the eighth century and the beginning of the sixth century B.C.E. He emphasizes that the material culture was very similar on both sides of the Arabah during this period, so the need for Israel to differentiate themselves from the growing group of

fully justify the perception that the nations are ethnically related. Israel and Edom were indeed in perpetual conflict, but Israel was on similar terms with other neighbors, such as the Philistines, Aram, Ammon, and Moab, nations of equal proximity to Israel. The Canaanites even inhabited the same territory as Israel. But no legends about sibling rivalry have risen in relation to any other nation.

Kinship and Language

Genesis 25:19–34 relates the birth story of twins Jacob and Esau, who were born to Isaac and Rebecca. The story emphasizes the fact that they are twins, but at the same time highlights the differences between them: Esau was hairy, while Jacob, it emerges later, was not. The story continues, noting their differences as they grow: Esau is a hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob is a quiet tent-dweller. The polarity of their simultaneous closeness and divergence is introduced in the very first verses of their story. The biblical text seeks to present a family connection between the two nations.

From what little is known about the Edomites, it emerges that the two nations had much in common. There are no known surviving Edomite texts, and the few extant Edomite inscriptions shed little light on the nature of their religion and culture. There is even much controversy about their language. Nonetheless, it is clear that the languages of the Edomites, Moabites, and Ammonites are closely related to Ancient Hebrew.[4] This is evident, for example, from the fact that the Moabite inscription on the Mesha Stele is barely distinguishable from Ancient Hebrew.[5] Scholars even debate whether certain inscriptions are written in Edomite or Hebrew. The close sister languages certainly contributed to the perception that the two nations were brothers.

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immigrants resulted in the terminology of "brotherhood." See J. M. Tebes, "'You Shall Not Abhor an Edomite, for He Is Your Brother': The Tradition of Esau and the Edomite Genealogies from an Anthropological Perspective," *JHS* 6 (2006): 2–30. The biggest problem with Tebes's description is that this similarity also existed between Israel and the Moabites and the Ammonites, and to a great extent, with the Canaanites as well, but no such fraternal tradition ever developed with these other nations. Not only does Tebes's model fail to apply to these other nations, but in the book of Genesis Canaan is said to have descended from Ham, while Israel is from Shem.

4. J. Naveh, "The Scripts of Two Ostraca from Elath," *BASOR* 183 (1966): 27–30; F. Israel, "Miscellanea idumea," *Rivista biblica* 27 (1979): 171–203; I. Beit-Arieh and B. Cresson, "An Edomite Ostracon from Horvat ʿuza," *Tel Aviv* 12 (1985): 96–101; I. Beit-Arieh, "Ḥorvat ʿUzza: A Border Fortress in the Eastern Negev," *Qadmoniot* 19 (1986): 31–41 [Hebrew] 38–39; D. S. Vanderhooft, "The Edomite Dialect and Script: A Review of the Evidence," in *You Shall Not Abhor an Edomite for He Is Your Brother: Edom and Seir in History and Tradition*, ed. D. V. Edelman, Archaeology and Biblical Studies 3 (Atlanta: SBL, 1995), 137–57. See also J. Naveh, *Early History of the Alphabet* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1989), 100–109 [Hebrew]. Naveh shows that these nations adopted the Hebrew script.

5. It has also been suggested that the Mesha Stele was written in Hebrew. See the summary of C. Rabin, *Semitic Languages: An Introduction*, The Biblical Encyclopedia Library 5 (Jerusalem: Bialik, 1991), 71–75 [Hebrew].

Edomite Religion

Linguistic proximity alone cannot explain the story of Israel and Edom's fraternal origins; Hebrew is also very similar to the language of the Canaanites, for example, from whom the Judeans always segregated themselves, largely for religious reasons. The Hebrew Bible frequently denounces the Canaanite religion, which it considers an abomination (for example: Deut 7:24–26; 12:2–3), but not a word is said against the Edomite religion. In fact, in contrast to condemnation of other nations, there is no criticism of Edomite idolatry at all in the Bible. Moreover, the name of the chief Edomite god is not mentioned, unlike the gods of other nations, such as *Milcom*, the Ammonite god, or the Moabite god *Chemosh*, who are both considered an abomination (1 Kgs 11:5, 7; 2 Kgs 23:13). Even when the biblical narrator lists the foreign wives Solomon married, Edomite women among them, and describes the idols they persuaded him to serve, there is no mention of any Edomite gods (1 Kgs 1–8):

> King Solomon loved many foreign women along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women. . . . For Solomon followed Astarte the goddess of the Sidonians, and Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. . . . Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountain east of Jerusalem. He did the same for all his foreign wives, who offered incense and sacrificed to their gods.

Archaeological findings suggest that the chief Edomite god was Qôs.[6] Explicit evidence is fairly late; a Nabatean stele found in Khirbet et-Tannur is dated between the first century B.C.E. and the first century C.E.[7] The earliest evidence of worship of Qôs is found in Assyrian records, where the name Qôs appears theophorically in a list of private names, in an inscription where King Tiglath-Pileser refers to an Edomite king called *Qos-Malaka* (meaning "Qôs has become king").[8] There are several references to Qôs in seventh and sixth century B.C.E. inscriptions from Judah and Edom.[9] Oded discovered Ancient Egyptian inscriptions dating back to the period of Rameses II.[10] Theophoric names that incorporate Qôs appear twice in the Bible,

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6. For a summary of the god Qôs, see E. A. Knauf, "Qôs," in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, ed. K. Van Der Torn, B. Becking, and P. W. van der Horst, 2nd ed., (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 674–77.

7. R. Savignac, "Le dieu nabatéen de La'aban et son temple," *RB* 46 (1937): 401–16; J. T. Milik, "Nouvelles inscriptions nabatéennes," *Syria* 35 (1958): 227–51; Bartlett, *Edom and the Edomites,* 200.

8. Ibid., 200–201, 204–7. Concerning Qôs as the Edomite god, see also T. C. Vriezen, "The Edomite Deity Qaus," *Oudtestamentische Studien* 14 (1965): 330–53. About the Tiglath-Pileser inscription, see Bartlett, *Edom and the Edomites,* 129.

9. Ibid., 204–5; Beit-Arieh and Cresson, "An Edomite Ostracon," 97.

10. B. Oded, "Egyptian References to the Edomite Deity Qaus," *Andrew University Seminary Studies* 9 (1971): 47–50.

in Ezra 2:53 and Neh 7:55. Some scholars, however, are skeptical regarding Qôs's status as the Edomite god in ancient times.[11]

Scholars have speculated that the Bible's omission of any reference to or criticism of the Edomite religion is due to its similarity to Israel's. Some explain that the Edomites worshiped Israel's God;[12] others explain that the Edomite god was similar to the God of Israel.[13] Some are even convinced that worship of the Israelite God originated in the south and was practiced by several nations in the region, Israel and Edom among them.[14] Bartlett is inclined to believe that the Edomites worshiped the Israelite God, but, unlike Israel, not exclusively; they also worshiped other gods, among them Qôs. He emphasizes that the notion of Israel and Edom's brotherhood is based not only on the identity of the nations' founding father but also on certain religious affinity between the nations.[15] Today, there is insufficient evidence to determine the precise nature of the Edomite religion,[16] but there seems to be a certain connection between their worship and Israel's. The people of Israel presumably attributed this to the common origin of the nations, who were both descended from Isaac the son of Abraham.[17]

Scholars have noted several biblical verses that support the religious affinity between Edom and Israel:

> Deut 33:2: The Lord came from Sinai, and dawned *from Seir* upon us; He shone forth from Mount Paran. With Him were myriads of holy ones; at his right, a host of His own.

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11. Rose is convinced that Qôs was originally the deity of Arabic tribes, and the Edomites only began worshiping him with the Arabic invasions of the south, which began in the seventh century B.C.E. M. Rose, "Yahweh in Israel: Qaus in Edom?" *JSOT* 4 (1977): 28–34.

12. Bartlett, *Edom and the Edomites,* 198–99. See also L. Haney, "Yhwh, the God of Israel . . . and of Edom? The Relationships in the Oracle to Edom in Jeremiah 49:7–22," in *Uprooting and Planting: Essays on Jeremiah for Leslie Allen*, ed. J. Goldingay (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2007), 78–115.

13. J. Gray, "The Desert Sojourn of the Hebrews and the Sinai-Horeb Tradition," *VT* 4 (1954): 148–54.

14. For variations on this idea, see A. Alt, *Kleine Schriften zur Geschichte des volkes Israel* (Munich: Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1953), 60; Waterman, "Jacob," 25–43; J. Gray, "The God YW in the Religion of Canaan," *JNES* 12 (1953): 278–83; Rose, "Yahweh in Israel," 28–34; L. E. Axelsson, *The Lord Rose Up from Seir: Studies in the History and Traditions of the Negev and Southern Judah*, Coniectanea Biblica Old Testament 25 (Lund: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1987), 48–65; J. A. Dearman, "Edomite Religion: A Survey and an Examination of Some Recent Contributions," in *You Shall Not Abhor an Edomite for He Is Your Brother: Edom and Seir in History and Tradition*, ed. D. Vikander Edelman, Archaeology and Biblical Studies 3 (Atlanta: SBL, 1995), 127. And recently, J. Kelley, "Toward a New Synthesis of the God of Edom and Yahweh," *Antiguo Oriente* 7 (2009): 255–80.

15. Bartlett, *Edom and the Edomites,* 198.

16. Dearman is doubtful about the possibility of drawing definite conclusions about Edomite religion. See Dearman, "Edomite Religion," 119–36.

17. J. R. Bartlett, "The Brotherhood of Edom," *JSOT* 4 (1977): 2–27; Rose, "Yahweh in Israel," 28–34.

> Judg 5:4: Lord, when You *went out from Seir*, when You marched from the region of Edom, the earth trembled, and the heavens poured, the clouds indeed poured water.
>
> Hab 3:3: God came *from Teman*, the Holy One from Mount Paran. *Selah!* His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of His praise.

Midrashic literature already observed these sources, and in this context, described God's coming from Edom.[18] Their interpretation of God's arrival from the south is reflected in the midrashic anecdote that God asked every nation in the world to accept the Torah before approaching Israel, who accepted it freely.[19] These biblical sources may indicate a certain relationship between Edom and the God of Israel; they can be considered a reflection of Israel's belief that Edom was affiliated with their own God.[20]

There is insufficient information to explain this phenomenon, but the relationship between Isaac and Esau in Genesis may be illuminating. If, as many hold, the stories in Genesis reflect later periods in history, then the narratives of Esau's and Jacob's marriages may be a symbolic expression of their religious loyalties. Jacob is sent to find a wife among Rebecca's family because of Rebecca and Isaac's strong reservations about marriage with the daughters of the land (Gen 27:46—28:1). In contrast, Esau weds Hittite women, much to his parents' chagrin (Gen 28:8–9). After he perceives his parents' disapproval of his Canaanite wives, he also marries the daughter of Ishmael (Gen 28:8–9). Esau's act is an imitation of Jacob's—he only does so after he sees that Jacob is sent to Haran to find a wife and not immediately after his marriages with the Hittites. This narrative shows that, while Jacob stringently honors the taboo against mixing with the daughters of the land, Esau marries Canaanite women but maintains his identification with his parents and attempts to seek a wife who meets their approval as well. This parallels Israel's careful preservation of their identity in contrast with Edom's mixed identity, which is in line with Bartlett's aforementioned claim that Edom served the Israelite God, but not exclusively.

2 Chronicles 25:11–16 relates to the gods of Edom without mentioning their name. This source recounts how Amaziah, victorious over the inhabitants of Seir, took their gods and worshiped them, bowing to them and offering incense. These gods are not identified; and his motivation for worshiping them is far from clear. The prophet's subsequent rebuke is most fitting—"Why have you resorted to a people's gods who could not deliver their own people from your hand?"[21] Japhet explains that Amaziah's vic-

18. For example: *Sifre on Deuteronomy* (ed. L. Finkelstein. New York: JTS; repr., Brolini: Abteilung, 1939), 395.

19. See also *Tanchuma Buber*, *Shoftim*, §9; *Tanchuma Buber*, *vezot haberakha*, §3.

20. The description of God's arrival at Edom is also found in a later source, in Isa 63:1, which I will discuss later, in my analysis of Isa 63:1–6.

21. Bartlett explains that the author of Chronicles is unfamiliar with Edom because Edom had been destroyed two generations earlier, but this is unconvincing. Their ab-

tory over Edom caused him to be excessively proud, as King Jehoash of Israel explicitly says to him in 2 Kgs 25:19, and this pride resulted in idol worship.[22] Why pride would lead him to worship the gods of the nation he just defeated, however, is unclear. Cogan, more logically, claims that victory was perceived as the defeated god's acquiescence and aid to the victorious nation, so the victors would give thanks to the gods of the defeated nation; this, he explains, was also a familiar phenomenon in Assyria.[23] While this argument is convincing, one would expect to see other examples of this practice in the Bible, but Amaziah's incident is unique. Following Luria's suggestion, it may be that, while Amaziah sought to thank the Edomite gods for their role in his victory, he only felt able to do so because of the religious proximity between Edom and Israel. Perhaps he believed that the similarity between Israel and Edom's deity allowed him to worship Edom's god without betraying loyalty to the God of Israel.[24]

Edomite Wisdom

Other sources also support the view that Israel experienced some degree of religious affinity with the Edomites. Jeremiah and Obadiah prophesy about the loss of wisdom in Edom (Jer 49:7; Obad 8). Indeed, different biblical sources testify that Edom was known for its wisdom and wisdom lore.[25] This is most salient in the book of Job, which is set in Edom, with Edomite protagonists.[26] Job lived in the land of Uz (Job 1:1). The name Uz appears in Gen 10:23 as one of Aram's sons, and in Gen 22:21, as one of Nahor's sons. In Gen 36:38, Uz is associated with Edom because Uz features as the son of Dishan, the son of Seir. In Lam 4:21, this association is more explicit: "Rejoice and be glad, O daughter Edom, you that live in the land of Uz." Uz in the book of Job is in Edom; Eliphaz the Temanite, Job's friend, is an Edomite character; Eliphaz's name is also the name of Esau's son (Gen

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sence for two generations does not necessarily mean that the author had no knowledge of Edomite worship. Bartlett, *Edom and the Edomites*, 195.

22. S. Japhet, *I and II Chronicles: A Commentary*, OTL (London: SCM, 1993), 866.

23. M. Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion: Assyria, Judah and Israel in the Eighth and Seventh Centuries* B.C.E. (Missoula: SBL and Scholars Press, 1974), 9–15, 117; R. B. Dillard, *2 Chronicles* (WBC; Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 201.

24. B. Z. Luria, "Amaziah, King of Judah, and the Gods of Edom," *Beit Mikra* 30 (1984–85): 353–60 [Hebrew].

25. See also R. H. Pfeiffer, "Edomitic Wisdom," *ZAW* 44 (1926): 13–25. Tebes is convinced that Edomitic wisdom refers to their skill in craftsmanship. J. M. Tebes, "The 'Wisdom' of Edom," *Biblische Notizen* 143 (2009): 97–117. Gordis objects to Pfeiffer, claiming that no trace of Edomitic wisdom remains, and no Edomitic text has been discovered, so that the whole concept is speculative and unprovable. See R. Gordis, "Edom, Israel and Amos: An Unrecognized Source for Edomite History," in *Essays on the Occasion of the Seventieth Anniversary of the Dropsie University,* ed. A. I. Katsh and L. Nemoy (Philadelphia: Dropsie University Press, 1979), 116 n. 28.

26. S. R. Driver and G. B. Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1921), xxvii–xxxi.

36:4), and Eliphaz is from Teman, in Edom, and presumably named after the son of Eliphaz in Genesis (36:15, 42). In several places, it is mentioned that Teman is a city in Edom, and the entire land is sometimes synecdochically referred to as Teman (Jer 49:20; Amos 1:12; Obad 7).[27] This setting implies that Israel perceived Edom as a place of wisdom.[28] In the Bible, wisdom is not entirely distinct from religious faith. Wisdom and fear of God are represented as inextricable in both Proverbs and Job. Moreover, Deut 4:6 implies that the nations perceive Israel's observance of the Torah and its laws as the key to their ascribed wisdom:

> You must observe them diligently, for this will show your wisdom and discernment to the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and discerning people!"

Edom's association with wisdom may have generated cultural and religious affinity between the two nations. This affinity explains how a work that explores the mysterious ways of the God of Israel and the enduring yet searching faith of God's believers can be acted out by Edomite characters and set in the land of Edom without detracting from the authentic, Israelite nature of the book. The wisdom attributed to Edom is apparently another factor that reinforces the notion of fraternity between the two nations.[29]

Edom and the Law in Deuteronomy 23:8–9

Deut 23:8–9 presents a law relating to Edom:

> You shall not abhor any of the Edomites, for they are your kin. You shall not abhor any of the Egyptians, because you were an alien residing in their land. The children of the third generation that are born to them may be admitted to the assembly of the Lord.

This law contains both emotional and practical aspects. The first verse prohibits hatred of the Edomite, because he is Israel's brother. The second verse concerns marriage: an Edomite may not become a member of the Israelite community through marriage, but this only applies to the first two generations; the third generation is admitted. A similar law applies to Egyptians.

The Midrash, and several commentators, interpreted this marital prohibition as a punishment for the Edomites, who refused to let Israel pass through their land.[30] This explanation, however, is unlikely. Rather than focus on the prohibition that endures for three generations, the law should be compared to the marital prohibitions regarding other nations in order

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27. The conclusion of the Septuagint translation states that Job is the "Jobab" mentioned in Gen 36:33–35.

28. While there are several who hold that the book of Job is Edomitic, this approach has been rejected by many. See, for example, D. J. A. Clines, *Job 1–20* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1989), lvii.

29. Bartlett also hints to this in *Edom and the Edomites*, 22.

30. Rashi, Naḥmanides, Rabbi Joseph Bekhor Shor.

to determine whether the law's emphasis is on the *prohibition* against Edom or the fact that, after three generations, the Edomite is *permitted* to enter the Israelite community. The Ammonite, the Moabite, and the Canaanite are forever banned from marrying into Israel; marriage with other nations is not even mentioned. Two possible explanations for the interminable prohibition against Moabites and Ammonites (Deut 23:4–5) are their refusal to give the Israelites bread and water on their journey from Egypt to Canaan (Deut 2:9–23) and Moab's hiring of Balaam to curse Israel (Num 22:1–24:25).[31] These justifications, however, do not fully explain the legal distinction between Edom and Moab/Ammon. Ammon and Moab did not come to Israel's aid on their harsh journey from Egypt, but nor did Edom; on the contrary, they refused them passage and threatened them with the sword. The story of Balaam only concerns Moab; it does not explain the antagonism against Ammon.

The marriage laws concerning Edom and Egypt should therefore be considered lenient in comparison to prohibitions against other nations: marriage with Canaanites, Moabites, or Ammonites is absolutely forbidden. The law concerning Egyptians is more lenient because Israel sojourned in Egypt (Deut 23:22); marriage with Edom is permissible after two generations because Edom is perceived as Israel's brother.[32] The temporary

31. An Aggadic interpretation describes how the distinction between Edom and Egypt, and Ammon and Moab, was made because the latter attempted to lead Israel to sin, so their punishment is more severe. *Numbers Rabbah* (Vilna edition), *Pinhas* 21:4:

> Oppress the Midianites, why? Because they seek to oppress you, and the Sages say, One who seeks to kill you, rise to kill him first. Rabbi Shimon says, Why is one who leads someone to sin is worse than a murderer? The murderer destroys his life in this world, but he still has a portion in the World to Come, whereas one who leads someone to sin destroys his life in this world and his portion in the next. Two nations met Israel with the sword, and two met them with sin; the Egyptians and the Edomites met them with the sword: (Exod 15:9) "The enemy said, 'I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil, my desire shall have its fill of them. I will draw my sword"; (Num 20:18) But Edom said to him, "You shall not pass through, or we will come out with the sword against you." Two nations met Israel with sin, the Moabites and the Ammonites. Those who met them with the sword, it is written, "You shall not abhor an Edomite" (Deut 23:8) and "You shall not abhor an Egyptian," but those who sought to lead Israel to sin, it is written: "No Ammonite or Moabite shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord. Even to the tenth generation" (Deut 23:4).

Similarly, Rashi comments on Deut 23:9:

> Children who are born to them in the third generation: But other nations are allowed to marry immediately. Thus, you learn from here that someone who causes a person to sin does worse to him than one who kills him, for one who kills him, kills him only in this world, whereas one who leads him to sin removes him from both this world and from the World to Come. Therefore, Edom, who met them with the sword was not utterly despised, nor Egypt, who drowned them. Those who caused them to sin were utterly despised.

32. See also Naḥmanides; Rabbi Joseph Bekhor Shor; S. R. Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902), 262; J. H. Tigay,

marital prohibition with Edom is presumably due to their refusal to allow Israel passage, which justifies initial reservation, but the ban is lifted after three generations because of the conceptualized fraternity between the two nations,[33] which is stated explicitly in v. 8: "You shall not abhor any of the Edomites, for they are your kin." In Deuteronomy, Moses recounts how Israel was ordered to refrain from fighting Edom, Ammon, and Moab (2:9, 19). No reason is given for restraint against Ammon and Moab, but the verses explicitly state that Edom is Israel's brother (2:4, 8), which presumably explains the divine ordination for restraint against Edom. This idea of brotherhood, therefore, has practical implications: hating them is forbidden, and they may become part of the congregation from the third generation.[34]

"Do Not Provoke Them": Israel's Encounter with Edom before Entrance to the Land

The story of Israel's encounter with Edom before they enter Canaan is narrated in two different sources: in Num 20:14–21 and Deut 2:2–8 (and v. 29). There are infamous contradictions between the two sources. In Numbers, the Edomites do not fear Israel; they threaten to attack them if Israel approaches their borders (20:20–21). According to Deuteronomy, however, the Edomites are afraid of Israel (Deut 2:4). The Numbers narrative recounts that Edom denied Israel passage through their land, and refused to sell them food and water, so that the Israelites were forced to circumvent the land of Edom (Num 21:4). This contradicts the account in Deuteronomy, which relates that the Edomites sold the Israelites food and water when they passed through their territory (Deut 20:28–29). Some have attempted to harmonize the two narratives into one account,[35] while others claim that the two accounts report two different incidents. Ibn Ezra explains that Deut 20 narrates how Esau's descendants allowed Israel to pass through, while Deut 2 narrates a different negotiation, this time with the king of

Deuteronomy, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 212.

33. C. M. Carmichael, "A New View of the Origin of the Deuteronomic Credo," *VT* 19 (1969): 232–33, 273–89.

34. This attitude toward Edom is so unusual that Bartlett admits that there is no satisfactory explanation for it. Because he holds that the fraternal relationship is an expression of animosity between the nations (that is, sibling rivalry), he cannot determine when this law was established. Eventually, he reaches the conclusion that it is related to ancient religious affinity between them. Bartlett, *Edom and the Edomites,* 183–84. Cannon claims that this due to the anti-Assyrian treaty to which Edom and Judah belonged. W. W. Cannon, "Israel and Edom: The Oracle of Obadiah 1:11," *Theology* 15 (1927): 129–40, 191–200. Carmichael is convinced that the positive attitude toward Edom is related to the positive reunion of Esau and Jacob in Gen 33. Carmichael, "A New View," 273–89.

35. According to Rashi's commentary on 2:29, the Edomites did not allow Israel to pass through their borders, but they did sell them food and water. This is the same view held by Naḥmanides in 23:5.

Edom, who refused them entry (see his commentary on 2:29). Others argue that the two narratives are derived from two different sources.[36]

Regardless of their contradictions and origin, for our purposes it is important to note that both narratives convey how Israel displayed tolerance toward Edom because of the fraternal connection between the nations. In Numbers, Moses' appeal to Edom begins with the phrase "Thus says your brother Israel" (20:14). Edom refuses Israel passage and threatens to attack, but Israel desists. Targum Pseudo-Jonathan explains why Israel refrains from going out to war with them:

> And Edomea came out to meet him with a large army and with a strong hand. So Edomea would not suffer Israel to pass through his coast; and Israel turned away from him, because it was commanded from before the Word of the Heavens that they should not set battle in array against them, seeing that the time had not yet come when the punishment of Edom should be given into their hands.

Other possible explanations are that Israel eschews combat because of Edom's strength or because Edom's territory was not part of the promised land.[37] Naḥmanides explains that they did not fight because God would not permit them, as stated in Deut 2. The latter interpretation is convincing because it also clarifies why Israel answers Sihon's aggressive advances with war, while no such battle develops against Edom. If so, then this is another element in the Numbers account that reflects the fraternal bond between Edom and Israel. This fraternity occupies a more central place in the narrative in Deuteronomy, which is evident from God's warning to the people (2:4–8):

> Charge the people as follows: You are about to pass through the territory of your kindred, the descendants of Esau, who live in Seir. They will be afraid of you, so, be very careful not to engage in battle with them, for I will not give you even so much as a foot's length of their land, since I have given Mount Seir to Esau as a possession. You shall purchase food from them for money, so that you may eat; and you shall also buy water from them for money, so that you may drink. Surely the Lord your God has blessed you in all your undertakings; He knows your going through this great wilderness. These forty years the Lord your God has been with

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36. For example: M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11* (AB 5; New York: Doubleday, 1991), 165–66; for a discussion of different methods, see D. A. Glatt-Gilad, "The Re-interpretation of the Edomite-Israelite Encounter in Deuteronomy ii," *VT* 47 (1997): 441–55. Glatt-Gilad holds the original opinion that Israel was initially forced to circumvent the land of Edom as punishment for the transgression of the spies. Once this period was over, however, they were able to journey freely toward the promised land (pp. 447–55).

37. Edom's strength: J. Milgrom, *Numbers*, JPS Torach Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), 169. See also E. Bridge, "Polite Israel and Impolite Edom: Israel's Request to Travel through Edom in Numbers 20:14–21," *JSOT* 35 (2010): 77–88. Edom not part of the promised land: T. R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 393.

> you; you have lacked nothing." So we passed by our kin, the descendants of Esau who live in Seir, leaving behind the route of the Arabah, and leaving behind Elath and Ezion-geber.

These verses imply that God has bequeathed land to Esau, just as land has been promised to Israel. Many read this command to the people as a statement of the sovereignty of God, who chooses how to distribute land to the nations, at will allotting land to Israel, to the Edomites, to the Ammonites (Deut 2:9), and to the Moabites (Deut 2:19).[38]

This command, however, does not seem to be a mere theological demonstration of God's exclusive sovereignty, because the same could have been achieved through the order to fight and conquer the land with faith that God alone enables victory, a theme that reoccurs frequently in the book of Joshua. This sovereignty could have been expressed through God's hardening of the hearts of these nations, just as Sihon's heart is hardened (Deut 2:30). The concept that God distributes land to each nation is not just an assertion of divine sovereignty; rather, the different ways that this sovereignty is manifested can be gleaned from the different narratives. God's commandment to refrain from war against Ammon and Moab seems to be related to their descent from Lot, Abraham's nephew, while the similar command concerning Edom is due to the fraternal connection between Edom and Israel. Moreover, this passage seems to imply that God has a special relationship with Edom. Although God selected Israel as the chosen people to inherit the chosen land, a theme repeatedly conveyed through the stories of Genesis, Esau's departure to Mount Seir was not merely a negative measure to banish him from the land of Canaan but a positive act of inheritance. Jacob receives the land of Canaan, while Esau receives Mount Seir as a consolation prize of sorts. While Ammon and Moab are also said to have inherited their land, Edom's description is unique because of the double emphasis on the fraternal relations between Edom and Israel; moreover, throughout the passage Edom is referred to as Esau, which transports the reader back to the story of Jacob and Esau in Genesis.

Even if this explanation is rejected, this narrative is based on the idea that Edom and Israel are brothers, and Israel must treat them as such. This brotherhood is asserted by God: "the territory of your kindred, the descendants of Esau" (2:4). The author illustrates how the people has internalized this relationship through Moses' terminology when he speaks on their behalf: "So we passed by *our kin*, the descendants of Esau who live in Seir" (2:8).

Conclusion

The fraternal relationship between Israel and Edom is expressed in many forms in the Hebrew Bible: the two nations share an etiological narrative,

38. P. C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 108; Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1–11*, 5; Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 24–25.

a similar language, a similar religion, and a similar culture. This notion arises from the origin myth of Israel and Edom as the descendants of twin brothers who are born to Isaac and Rebecca. In later periods, the similar language spoken by the two nations supported the idea of their brotherhood. Even though we have virtually no information about the Edomite religion, biblical evidence indicates a certain connection between the Edomites and Israel's religious belief in God. Sources in the Bible that associate Edom with wisdom strengthen the nations' affinity and the sense of brotherhood between them. This fraternal relationship finds legal expression in Deuteronomy (23:8–9) and narrative expression in the story of Israel's encounter with Edom before they enter the land (Num 20:14–21; Deut 2:2–8). Against this background, the fierce animosity between Edom and Judah reflected in other biblical sources evokes consternation. This animosity will be addressed later; we will first delve into the story of Jacob's selection and Esau's rejection in the book of Genesis.

Chapter 2

Jacob and Esau in the Book of Genesis

This chapter explores how the origins of the relationship between Israel and Edom are depicted through the biblical story of Jacob and Esau. The relevant passages appear in Gen 25:19–34; 27:1–28:9; 35:23–36, 43. The story of Isaac and Rebecca's twin sons has captivated readers and commentators over the generations, and much ink has been spilled over each verse. In this chapter, I will not be addressing every issue that arises from this complex narrative; rather, I will focus on the depiction of the relationship between Jacob and Esau and the parents' behavior toward them, particularly Isaac's. Above all, I will explore the question of how the account in Genesis portrays Jacob's election, Esau's rejection, and the process that leads to this choice, with especial focus on the reason for Esau's exclusion and his resultant status.

"Two Nations Are in Your Womb"

The story of Jacob and Esau's birth begins with the expression "These are the descendants of Isaac, Abraham's son," but the next words deviate from this introduction: "Abraham was the father of Isaac" (Gen 25:19). This phrase is not a direct continuation of the beginning of the sentence and should be considered a parenthetical clause that clarifies Isaac's status as Abraham's successor.[1] This claim is confirmed through comparison with the introduction to the chronicles of Ishmael in 25:12. The formula "These are the descendants of Ishmael, Abraham's son," is followed by the words "whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's slave-girl, bore to Abraham." The function of the second half of the verse becomes clear given the opening statement that Ishmael is Abraham's son; even though Ishmael was

1. Speiser also wonders about this clause. E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, AB 1 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1962), 196. Westermann suggests that these words come to emphasize the beginning of the verse: "Isaac the son of Abraham." C. Westermann, *Genesis 12–36*, trans. J. J. Scullion, Continental Commentary (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1981), 412. Coats argues that this sentence results from the fact that, in contrast to Ishmael's genealogical list in 25:12–18, Isaac's *toledot* formula introduces a story. See G. W. Coats, *Genesis: With an Introduction to Narrative Literature*, FOTL (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 184; G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1994), 174. Sarna believes that these words are intended to emphasize Isaac's inheritance of God's promise to Abraham. N. M. Sarna, *Genesis*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 178.

born to Abraham, his mother was Hagar, an Egyptian slave. The narrative then shifts to Isaac and retains the same sentence structure as Ishmael's introduction: "These are the descendants of Isaac, Abraham's son" (Gen 25:19). The second half of the verse, however, emphasizes Isaac's status as Abraham's heir: "Abraham was the father of Isaac." The double mention of Isaac's father, in contrast to the lowly maternal identity of Isaac's half-brother, asserts Isaac's place in the chosen dynasty.

This verse also has important implications for the narrative that follows, which is the story of Jacob and Esau's struggle for the birthright. This introduction, which clinches Isaac's chosen status, also anticipates the central theme of the next story: the question of inheritance in regard to Isaac's two sons, asking which one will be the heir of Abraham's dynasty, the next link in the chain of God's promise of seed to Abraham:

> To your offspring I will give this land (12:7).
>
> For all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth; so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted (13:15–16).
>
> On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates" (15:18).
>
> I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. I will establish my covenant between Me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. And I will give to you, and to your offspring after you, the land where you now live, all the land of Canaan, for a perpetual holding; and I will be their God (17–:6–8).
>
> I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies, and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed My voice (22:17–18).

The presentation of Isaac as Abraham's heir in the introduction to the birth story of Isaac's sons suggests that the tension between chosen and rejected son will recur in the next generation. The question of Abraham's continuity and Ishmael's status generated conflict between Abraham and Sarah. The story of Rebecca's barrenness, related in the next verse, recalls Sarah's barrenness, and heightens the reader's anticipation that the story about to unfold will repeat the pattern of the first link in Abraham's chain.

Indeed, this expectation is confirmed when fraternal conflict begins even sooner than anticipated; even before birth, in their mother's womb: "the children struggled together within her" (25:22). In response to Rebecca's

inquiry, God answers that there are two sons within her, who are to be the ancestors of two rival nations. A difficult pregnancy might result from one of many natural causes, but Rebecca's prenatal complications are explained as the sign of a future struggle between the nations that will descend from her sons. Very quickly, the reader's expectations that this story will address the question of Abraham and Isaac's heir are fulfilled.

According to God's words, the twins' struggle within their mother symbolizes the conflict that will arise between the brothers, as well as between the nations that will arise from them.[2] God's tidings teach the reader that this story is not just an isolated event but a historical blueprint of the future rise and fall of nations. This understanding is crucial, because not every story is a symbol of what is to come; a narrative is usually self-contained and self-explanatory rather than a parable. From its very beginning, however, this story reveals its own nature as a symbol, as a key to the future ties between nations. Essentially, each character is portrayed as consciously driven by this understanding: the blessing Isaac plans to give Esau is not for Esau the individual but is for the nation that will descend from him and dominate other nations: "Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may your mother's sons bow down to you. Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be everyone who blesses you" (27:29). After Jacob steals this blessing, Esau asks Isaac if he has another blessing to bestow on him, and he responds: "Isaac answered Esau, 'I have already made him your lord, and I have given him all his brothers as servants, and with grain and wine I have sustained him. What then can I do for you, my son?'" (27:37).

The narrative presents Rebecca as being motivated by God's prophecy that her sons will be the ancestors of nations, and Jacob presumably shares her position. Esau's projected attitude toward the sale of his birthright is an apt reflection of his character: "Esau said, "I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?" (25:32). Esau's words seem to reflect his awareness that the birthright will prove more significant for their descendants than for Jacob and himself, and he appears disinterested in what will transpire after his own death: "Esau despised his birthright" (25:34).[3] The same thought

2. Kaddari's dictionary defines the word as "strike each other, struggle." M. Kaddari, "רצץ," *A Dictionary of Biblical Hebrew* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 2006), 1030 [Hebrew].

3. Fokkelman emphasizes that Esau has no historical awareness. J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis,* Studia Semantica Neerlandica (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1975), 106.

This biblical quotation is according to the interpretation, "I am but mortal and will therefore die anyway." See, for example, Wenham, *Genesis,* 178. Others have interpreted it as "I am dying of hunger," for example, Skinner, *Genesis*, 362. Ibn Ezra claims, and Ahroni in his wake, that Isaac was poor and dependent on Esau to bring him food, so Esau figures that there is nothing to inherit anyway. R. Ahroni, "Why Did Esau Spurn the Birthright? A Study in Biblical Interpretation," *Judaism* 29 (1980): 323–31.

presumably occurs to Jacob when he proposes the deal to Esau. The fact that Esau is portrayed as having no regard for the future value of his birthright justifies and validates Jacob's purchase.[4]

Thus, from the very beginning, it is clear that the story will revolve around the question of the heir to Abraham's blessing. God's words to Rebecca already imply that the unfolding of present events is but an expression of what will happen in the future. This principle is what guides the characters Isaac, Rebecca, Esau, and Jacob throughout the narrative.

Jacob and Esau are twins, but the biblical text emphasizes the differences between them immediately after birth and continues to do so as they mature. At birth, Esau is already hairy, which will prove to be his hallmark, while Jacob's skin is smooth (27:11). Jacob is branded not by any physical characteristic but by the fact that he grasps Esau's heel during their birth, which will also be recalled later in the narrative: "Esau said, 'Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright; and look, now he has taken away my blessing'" (27:36). This implies that the infant Jacob's act illuminates why the twins struggled in Rebecca's womb: they both fought to become the natural firstborn. The physical difference between the twins at birth is not the only difference between them: the text jumps several years forward and describes the twins' separate interests, which some commentators interpret as differences in personality: "When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, living in tents" (25:27).

Not only the narrator emphasizes the episode's elements of fraternal rivalry; the parents also participate in this competition. Favoritism is not always the case in the Hebrew Bible: for example, when Joseph tells Jacob of his ambitious dreams to dominate his brothers, Jacob is not encouraging, despite his love for the son of his old age (Gen 37:3). Here, however, the biblical narrator relates each parent's preferences: "Isaac loved Esau, because he was fond of game; but Rebekah loved Jacob" (25:28). These preferences are not merely displays of emotion; both parents take decisive action for the benefit of their favored son. Isaac attempts to present Esau with an exclusive blessing, and Rebecca tricks her husband into bestowing it on Jacob.

4. Coats, *Genesis*, 187; M. Görg, "בזה," *TDOT* 2:60–65. Görg shows that every biblical instance of the root בזה is an insult to God. He therefore claims that Esau's contempt for the birthright is essentially showing contempt for God, which explains why Jacob wins his position. Some see Jacob's actions as positive, for example, Skinner, *Genesis,* 362; Wenham, however, believes that this transaction is premeditated by Jacob, who exploits Esau's weakness. Wenham, *Genesis*, 178. He does, however, note the biblical emphasis on Esau's contempt for the birthright and therefore concedes that Esau is undeserving. For a presentation of various explanations for the transaction and their justification in midrashic interpretation, see M. Maher, "The Transfer of the Birthright: Justifying the Ancestors," *Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association* 8 (1984): 1–24.

"One People Shall Be Stronger Than the Other": The Narrative Objective

Verses 29–30 in Gen 25 relate how Esau sells his birthright to Jacob in exchange for a mess of lentils. Chapter 27 describes how Jacob and Rebecca manage to steal the blessing that Isaac intended for Esau. Several crucial questions arise from these narratives. Is Jacob's character presented as exploitive, as he takes advantage of his brother's exhaustion in order to exact the birthright, and should this act be judged in a negative light?[5] Or does Esau's readiness to sell his privilege reflect his contempt for the birthright and his short-sightedness, and therefore his unworthiness, so that Jacob rightfully acquires the status of firstborn? What is the relationship between the birthright sold to Jacob and the blessing in ch. 27, which Jacob acquires through deceit[6]—are these two separate privileges, and if not, then why doesn't Jacob receive the blessing automatically?[7] Esau's words in ch. 27 imply that the two are one and the same, as I will shortly explain.[8] Whether the privileges are a package deal may be precisely the point of dispute between the brothers: the natural firstborn claims that he may have sold the birthright, but the blessing is still his and the younger brother stole it; while the figure of Jacob is portrayed as believing that the blessing is essentially the birthright and Esau's denial is the deception at hand, so that he is not stealing but taking what is rightfully his.[9] If this is

5. For a discussion of this subject and reservation of a moral discussion, see Gunkel, *Genesis*, 300. Gunkel emphasizes that it is illogical for a people to characterize itself with traits of deceit and therefore claims that, in their eyes, Jacob's actions were positive (p. 301). See also von Rad, *Genesis*, 262; Speiser, *Genesis,* 211. Sarna claims that the narration of the transaction deviates from usual narratives of transaction in the Bible, which end with a summary of the seller and buyer (Gen 23:18; 33:19; Josh 24:32; 2 Sam 24:24). Here, it only states that Esau was the seller, which he argues is another method that the Bible employs to detract from Jacob's attempts to steal the birthright. Sarna, *Genesis*, 182.

6. About the concept of blessing in the Bible and its characteristics, its *Sitz im Leben*, and how its operates, see J. Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture* (London: Cumberlege, 1926), 182.

7. According to Turner, the two are apparently identical, but Jacob, who already received the blessing, wants Isaac's confirmation through his blessing. See L. A. Turner, *Genesis*, Reading: A New Biblical Commentary (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 116. Similarly, see Driver, *Genesis*, 255. Steinmetz claims that Esau distinguishes between them and is convinced that they are two separate things, but he is mistaken, and whoever has the birthright is entitled to the blessing. D. Steinmetz, *From Father to Son: Kinship, Conflict and Continuity in Genesis*, Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991), 97.

8. See also Fokkelman, who is convinced that Jacob is already the firstborn, and the blessing is something else. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 107.

9. Sarna also questions why Esau expects to receive the blessing, even though he already sold the birthright. Sarna, *Genesis,* 189. Gispen argues that Isaac is a blind old man. God's will is fulfilled through Rebecca and Jacob's deception, according to Rebecca's prophecy. W. H. Gispen, "A Blessed Son of Abraham," in *Von Kanaan bis Kerala: Festschrift für J. P. M. van der Ploeg zur Vollendung des siebzigsten Lebensjahres am 4. Juli 1979*, ed.W. C. Delsman et al (Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1982), 117.

the case, does Isaac's desire to bless Esau violate the brothers' agreement, either wittingly or unwittingly, and is he required to take their transaction into consideration? Is Isaac portrayed as being unaware of his sons' deal? Is the twins' transaction legitimate in the first place;[10] is Isaac bound to their decision, or is their agreement overridden by the blessing? Of course, every possibility necessitates a different reading of the actions of Jacob and Esau: whether each cheats or is cheated, whether Esau is the firstborn by irrevocable right, or whether Esau, like many biblical firstborns, forfeits his right to Jacob.

The measures each parent takes are similarly difficult to explain: why does Rebecca deceive her husband? Allen argues that she seeks to fulfill her interpretation of the prophecy she hears during her pregnancy.[11] Does this mean that the figure of Isaac is unaware of God's words? Why does she fail to divulge God's words to him in the text? Can the reader speculate that Isaac's motivations for choosing who is to be blessed possibly hinge on Isaac's love for Esau's game, and the fact that he plans to bless Esau after eating a good piece of meat? How can this choice be understood, and how does his blindness relate to his wife and son's deception? Does it also serve to symbolize his blindness to Esau's flaws? The sequence of events implies that Isaac plans to give Esau the blessing he gives Jacob in 27:28–29, which includes agricultural blessing and dominance over his brothers and other nations. When Isaac sends Jacob to Haran, he blesses him with the blessing of Abraham (28:3–4). What is the relationship between these two blessings?

Each character in the story is presented in a problematic light. Jacob can be read as a trickster, exploiting Esau's hunger and fatigue in order to seize the birthright, and deceives his blind father in order to receive the blessing. In this narrative, deception is portrayed as an inherited trait—his mother Rebecca initiates and facilitates this deception. Esau's character shows contempt for the birthright, and marries unworthy Hittite women; later, he seeks to kill Jacob because he stole the blessing, coveting what he once despised. Isaac is depicted as a helpless blind man, unaware of his surroundings, deceived by his own wife and son. Despite his disproval and angst from Esau's unworthy marriages, and despite the fact that Abraham had Rebecca brought from Haran in order to prevent his own marriage with Canaanite women, Isaac still hopes to give Esau the blessing.

Many of these problems prove difficult to solve, barring the way to the crucial question: what is the relationship between the sale of the birthright, the theft of the blessing, and God's election of the heir?[12]

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10. Turner raises the possibility that the transaction was binding, but Isaac denied it, or was unaware of it. Turner, *Genesis*, 117.

11. C. G. Allen, "On Me Be the Curse, My Son!" in *Encounter with the Text: Form and History in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. M. Buss, Semeia Supplement 8 (Philadelphia: Fortress; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979), 163–71.

12. Sarna claims that as it is ultimately up to God, as is apparent from God's words to Rebecca in 25:23, the story of Jacob and Esau is actually a story of moral criticism of Jacob.

Unequivocal solutions to these questions are elusive. Many have been addressed by scholars and interpreters; some solutions seem to be supported by the text, while others fail to satisfy. The sheer obscurity of the narrative, however, creates the sense that the narrator purposely spins an ambiguous tale. Not one character can be read in a clear, consistent light throughout the story; the narrator could easily have illuminated the darkness, or at least given the reader a clearer path through the mist. But even if a brilliant, convincing explanation that clarifies every aspect of the story is reached, it is clear that no such explanation stood before ancient readers of the text, or before the generation that experienced the destruction of the temple, or before those who returned to Zion, whose relationship with Edom was filtered through their own reality and who read the Genesis narrative colored by their own experience. Perhaps they were more capable of piecing the different patches of the story together, like the authors of the Apocrypha or the later rabbinical midrashic writings. I presume, however, that they too encountered insurmountable difficulties in the story of Jacob and Esau.

In my opinion, any attempts to provide a single, coherent explanation of the entire story is doomed to failure, because the author of the story intentionally crafted an ambiguous narrative. What is the significance of the story—what does it wish to impart? The narrative's message, I believe, is integral to its enigmatic form.

Let us begin by exploring what this story is *not*. In contrast to rabbinical midrashic literature, or its retelling in the book of Jubilees, the story does *not* attempt to present Jacob as a righteous character who is chosen for his virtue.[13] Similarly, Esau is *not* presented as a negative character rejected because of his deeds. The text does not portray Isaac as one who acts with theological or educational intentions. Though she heard the word of God, Rebecca's love for Jacob is not portrayed as conditional on his chosen status; the text merely relates that "Rebecca loved Jacob" (25:28). The narrative clearly refrains from stating who is right and who is wrong, who is righteous and who is sinful, as it sometimes does; clearly, characterization of this sort is withheld from the reader.

Eventually, Jacob is revealed as the chosen son, but this becomes evident without dramatic, decisive declarations. The failure to focus on Jacob's selection suggests that the narrator's interest lies in the actual struggle be-

Sarna, *Genesis*, 179. Fretheim claims that the blessing is God's and He decides to give it to Jacob. Isaac's blessing does not bind God in any way. T. E. Fretheim, "Which Blessing Does Isaac Give Jacob?" in *Jews, Christians, and the Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures*, ed. A. Ogden Bellis and J. S. Kaminsky (Atlanta: SBL, 2000), 283.

13. For a critical presentation of Jacob in Genesis and Obadiah's and Malachi's explanations for favoring the younger son, see J. J. Krause, "Tradition, History and Our Story: Some Observations on Jacob and Esau in the Books of Obadiah and Malachi," *JSOT* 32 (2008): 475–86.

tween the brothers, rather than in characterizing who is righteous and who is undeserving. Even God is silent in this story, which is surprising given the divine declaration at the beginning of the narrative. God's prophecy to Rebecca foretells that a struggle is about to unfold, and (apparently) mentions who will emerge victorious. But these words do not determine that Jacob is worthy of being Isaac's successor. They predict that a nation will descend from each son, and that these nations will be in perpetual conflict with each other: "one people shall be stronger than the other" (25:23). The prophecy focuses on the conflict between them. The focal point of the story of Jacob and Esau is their struggle. This is emphasized in the divine words: "one people shall be stronger than the other," and the narrative we read is indeed the story of Jacob's determination to trump his brother, to clutch at his heel to prevent him from being born first, and to obtain the birthright and the blessing in Esau's place. We also bear witness to Esau's determination to receive the blessing, to Rebecca's determination to help Jacob, and to Isaac's determination to direct the blessing to the son he favors. These displays of strength are a narrative fulfillment of God's words to Rebecca, "one people shall be stronger than the other." They set the paradigm for the relationship that will develop between Edom and Israel over the course of history, a relationship that will constantly pit one nation's strength against the other.

However, if Jacob is eventually to be crowned as the chosen son, then why does the text place so much emphasis on the struggle between the brothers, rather than devote more room to the justification of Jacob's selection? Before I address this question, let us first explore how Jacob's selection is presented in the book of Genesis, beginning with the narrative representation of Isaac's opinions and behavior in the story.

Isaac's Blessing and the Fallacy of the Chosen Son

I previously stated that attempts to solve the narrative's countless problems are largely futile, but this does not mean, of course, that the problems should not be grappled with. While some remain elusive, others can be solved. I wish to focus on one subject, which may illuminate the struggle between Edom and Israel as it is represented in prophetic sources. I will first address Isaac's relationship with his sons, an issue that has the power to clarify a significant aspect of the relationship between the brothers.

Scholars, commentators and readers have frequently marveled at Isaac's marked preference for Esau, which seems to be influenced by superficial, trivial factors. The biblical narrator relates that Isaac prefers Esau because "he was fond of game" (25:28). When he wishes to bless his son before his death, Isaac first requests his favorite delicacy (27:7). His blessing is inspired by the smell of field and game that emanates from his son (27:27). How does this serve to characterize Isaac in the text? There are no textual indications illuminating why Isaac insists on blessing Esau rather than Jacob. It

is unclear whether Esau's marriages have any bearing on the blessings he does and does not receive in the story. Why, after realizing that Jacob has received the blessing he had intended for Esau, does Isaac give his younger son yet another blessing at his departure for Haran? This question is largely dependent on the relationship between the blessing Isaac plans on bestowing on Esau and the blessing he intentionally gives Jacob before he leaves for Haran.

Commentators have proposed various explanations. Many are convinced that the duplicity of blessings is a result of the fusion of different sources, attributing most of ch. 27 to JE and 27:46–28:1–9 to P. According to JE, Jacob deceives Isaac into giving him the blessing he intended for Esau, whom he favors, while according to P, Isaac prefers Jacob because of Esau's marriages with Canaanite women and sends him off with his blessing to look for a wife in Haran.[14]

This division into sources, however, is problematic. Reading the sources separately, 27:46 immediately after 26:35, Rebecca initiates conversation with Isaac, expressing her fear that Jacob will also take a Canaanite wife, and Isaac immediately sends Jacob to take a wife from Haran. It is unclear, however, why Isaac sends Jacob himself and not a servant, as his father did (ch. 24), unless the narrative is read in its final sequence, without skipping most of ch. 27. Rebecca tells Isaac that she is concerned about Jacob's marriage prospects in Canaan, but her fear that Esau's wrath will lead to Jacob's death is clearly the motivating factor behind this suggestion, as she explicitly states in 27:23–25: "Now therefore, my son, obey my voice; flee at once to my brother Laban in Haran, and stay with him a while, until your brother's fury turns away, until your brother's anger against you turns away, and he forgets what you have done to him; then I will send, and bring you back from there." This is found in ch. 27. Moreover, Rebecca twice expresses that life will not be worth living if Jacob marries a Canaanite in 27:46: "Then Rebekah said to Isaac, 'I am weary of my life because of the Hittite women. If Jacob marries one of the Hittite women such as these, one of the women of the land, what good will my life be to me?'" This concern may seem overstated in comparison with the text's milder portrayal of Esau's wives being "a source of bitterness to Isaac and Rebekah" (26:35), but her dramatic declaration makes sense if Jacob's life is on the line, as she states in ch. 27: "Why should I lose both of you in one day?" This implies that Jacob's mission to Haran is but a pretext for distancing him from his brother; she fears that Jacob will marry a Hittite, but first and foremost, she fears for his life.[15] Additionally, the story of Jacob's deception seems incomplete if

14. Gunkel, *Genesis*, 372. And see A. Dillmann, *Genesis: Critically and Exegetically Expound*, trans. W. B. Stevenson (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1897), 210–11; Skinner, *Genesis*, 368–75; Driver, *Genesis*, 262. According to Westermann, Gen 27 was originally an independent source concerned with inheriting the status of Isaac. Only later was a distinction made between the birthright and the blessing. Westermann, *Genesis*, 444.

15. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 101.

the beginning of ch. 28 is cut off: there is no reaction to Esau's murderous rage if the story does not continue in ch. 28. The narrative is only coherent if ch. 27 is read in its entirety and immediately followed by 28:1–9.[16]

According to another explanation, Rebecca and Jacob's successful deceit is accredited to Isaac's blindness.[17] Abrabanel comments:

> There is no doubt that Isaac should have contemplated the wickedness of Esau and his wives. He should have prayed to God, who would have let him know whether to bless the greater according to birth order or the greater according to his deeds. But love corrupts; he craved Esau's love and saw no faults with his deeds. And this is the meaning of "when Isaac was old and his eyes were dim so that he could not see."

This approach is problematic because Isaac *did* suffer bitterly from Esau's marriage. If, however, as the Abrabanel claims, Isaac still loved Esau blindly, then what changed after Jacob deceived him? This sort of twist in the tale should have increased Isaac's love for Esau and indignation toward Jacob, rather than the contrary.

A third approach claims that Isaac had planned everything at the outset. He had already chosen Jacob as his successor, as indicated from his bestowal of Abraham's blessing on him when he departs for Haran.[18] Isaac intended to bless Esau with a separate, purely material blessing that would convince him to mend his ways.[19] This argument, however, cannot easily be extracted from a straightforward reading of the text. First, the narrator relates that Isaac loves Esau because of his love for game (25:28) and there is no hint that he feels otherwise. Moreover, after Isaac's discovery of Jacob's deceit, his reaction does not imply that he intended to give him the blessing in the first place. Rather, his description of Jacob's act is harsh: "Your brother came deceitfully, and he has taken away your blessing" (27:35). Isaac makes no attempt to defend Jacob, which would presumably have been the case if he had planned to bless him; on the contrary, he incriminates him before Esau.

Another explanation draws a distinction between the blessing of the firstborn, which is intended for Esau, and Abraham's blessing, which is intended for Jacob.[20] According to this reading, Isaac wishes to bestow

16. Indeed, a number of scholars see 27:46–28:9 as a direct continuation of ch. 27 and even point out a unified structure. See, for example, Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis,* 97–112. See also S. Talmon, *Darkhei HaSipur BaMiqra*, ed. G. Gil (Jerusalem: Academon, 1965), 24 [Hebrew]. The separation into two sources is challenged by Wenham (*Genesis*, 203–4). In his opinion, 28:1–9 is also ascribed to J.

17. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 101.

18. Fretheim, "Which Blessing Does Isaac Give Jacob?" 279–91.

19. Ohr Hahayim's commentary on 27:1: "And Isaac's reason for wanting to bless the evil Esau was that he thought that the blessing would change him for the better, for righteous people are pained when there is an evil person among them and he tried to improve him, and it may have been helpful."

20. N. Leibowitz, *New Studies in Bereshit/Genesis* (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization,

abundance on Esau, as befits a firstborn, but this is irrespective of his selection of Jacob as his successor. In my opinion, this reading comes closer to the meaning of the text, but it too presents narrative problems: if the blessing has no bearing on who is the chosen heir, then the drama of ch. 27 is basically redundant, at best touching on a minor aspect of the issue of inheritance. Within this paradigm, either Jacob and Rebecca themselves failed to distinguish between the material blessing and Abraham's blessing, with their entire deception undertaken for little reason, or they are aware of the distinction and know that Jacob is the chosen son, but choose to upset their family dynamics for a relatively small reward. This reading suggests that a disproportionately large narrative space is devoted to the story of the deception, as Jacob is already the chosen son.

I wish to propose a different theory. I believe that a straightforward reading of the text does not imply that Isaac intends to reject either of his sons; both were born at the same time from the same mother, and he therefore assumed that both of them would inherit him.[21] The assumption that only one son will inherit his father is based on the reader's familiarity with the story's ending, but approaching the text with fresh eyes, the idea that one twin will be rejected is actually counterintuitive. What reason had he to suppose that one son would be rejected? His preference for Esau did not necessitate Jacob's exclusion from the family; he merely favored Esau because he was his firstborn, the future head of the family, a family that included Jacob.

Read literally, God's promise to Abraham, "it is through Isaac that offspring shall be named for you" (21:12), implies—and by no means rules out—that all of Isaac's descendants, all those born to Rebecca, will continue in Abraham's path. While Isaac presumably witnessed the exclusion of his half-brother Ishmael, as well as the children of Ketura, from God's promise to their father, this can be attributed to the fact that only Sarah's son, Isaac, was to continue Abraham's legacy.

Isaac's assumption that both his sons will inherit him can be reinforced *a fortiori* by the fact that his father Abraham assumes that both Ishmael and Isaac will inherit him, even though Ishmael was born of the concubine Hagar. When Sarah demands Hagar and Ishmael's expulsion from his household, "she said to Abraham, 'Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac'" (21:10), Abraham is stunned: "The matter was very distressing to Abraham on account of his son" (21:11). Sarah demands that Isaac alone will be Abraham's heir, while Abraham expected both Isaac and Ishmael to inherit

1933), 194–5 [Hebrew]; Y. M. Emanueli, *Genesis: Commentary and Insights* (Tel Aviv: ha-Hevrah le-heker ha-Mikra, 1978), 375 [Hebrew].

21. I have suggested this previously. See my "Why Edom: On the Hostility towards Jacob's Brother in Prophetic Sources," *VT* 51 (2006): 10 n. 38; idem, "From Adam to Esau and Israel: An Anti-Edomite Ideology in 1 Chronicles 1," *VT* 56 (2006): 295–96.

him. Only God's intervention clarifies Ishmael's future status to his father: "But God said to Abraham, 'Do not be distressed because of the boy and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be named for you'" (v. 12). In ch. 17, God appears to Abraham and makes a covenant with him, the covenant of circumcision. Immediately after this covenant, God promises that Sarah will bear a son: "I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her" (17:16). Abraham's reaction is one of wonder and amazement, but he expresses that he is already content with Ishmael: "O that Ishmael might live in your sight!" (v. 18). Even though God informs him that only Isaac will continue His covenant, "But my covenant I will establish with Isaac" (v. 21), Abraham still circumcises Ishmael. Abraham's hopeful circumcision of Ishmael, together with his reluctance to send him away, illustrates that Abraham does not easily reject Ishmael. He is only prepared to do so after God insists that he obey Sarah's commands but promises that Ishmael, too, has a future: "As for the son of the slave woman, I will make a nation of him also, because he is your offspring" (21:13).

If Abraham, whose first son was born of a concubine, initially assumes that both sons will inherit him, there is no reason to anticipate that Isaac will reject either of his sons, who are born to his only wife following a single pregnancy. Moreover, both of his sons are included in God's promise to Abraham that "it is through Isaac that offspring shall be named for you," and unlike Abraham, God never tells Isaac that only one of his sons will be chosen.

A careful reading of Isaac's blessing confirms this understanding. Isaac bestows three blessings on his sons. The first is to Jacob, believed to be Esau, 27:28–29. The second is to Esau when Jacob's deceit is discovered, and Esau insists on receiving a blessing as well, 27:39–40. The third is given to Jacob upon his departure to Padan-Aram to find a wife, 28:3–4.[22] The third blessing is the blessing of Abraham, the blessing of seed and inheritance of the land, the promise of Abraham's covenant. Upon bestowing this blessing, Isaac designates Jacob as the chosen son, the next link in his and Abraham's chain. In contrast, the first blessing, intended for Esau, does not include elements of God's covenant with Abraham, mentioning neither land nor seed; there is only mention of material wealth and dominion over his brothers.[23] This is an appropriate legacy for a firstborn, who will become the head of the tribe at his father's death.[24] This reading conveys

22. Regarding the division of these blessings to different sources, see pp. 28–29 above.

23. Von Rad indeed raises this question but offers no explanation. Von Rad, *Genesis*, 273. Wenham notes this, and in his opinion, the blessing's content proves that the blessing's receiver is less closely connected to God. See Wenham, *Genesis,* 210.

24. Scholars holding diachronic appriaches note the different styles of the blessings and ascribe Abraham's blessing in 27:46–28:9 to P and the firstborn's blessing in ch. 27

that Isaac, the patriarchal figure, perceives Esau as the head of the tribe is characterized as the agent of his sons' election or rejection in the narrative. Even the knowledge that two nations would descend from the two brothers did not entail that one son would be chosen and the other rejected. On the contrary; God's blessing to Abraham promises that "You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations" (17:4). This implies that God's special covenant with Abraham does not mean that his offspring will become a single nation; on the contrary, many nations shall continue his path. There is therefore no reason to believe that Rebecca sought to exclude one of her sons after hearing the word of God; rather, the motivating issue of ch. 27 revolves around the identity of the rightful firstborn.[25] The firstborn is the father's "might and the first fruits of [his] vigor," (Gen 49:3), with more rights to the father's property: a double share of inheritance (Deut 21:17).[26] The question of selection or rejection is not the focus of this episode.

It is also worth noting that although Isaac initially expresses doubt that he has another blessing to give Esau, the promise that Esau then receives does not differ significantly from Jacob's. Indeed, we later learn that both Jacob and Esau are endowed with much wealth and many wives and children. Jacob's blessing may be superior, but both sons seem blessed.[27]

This reading is supported by the fact that one generation later, none of Jacob's sons are excluded. There is no lack of rivalry or hostility between Jacob's sons, but their animosity revolves around which son will be the leader among his brothers. Joseph dreams that his brothers are bowing down to him, a dream that expresses his ambition to be the head of his family clan. The unspoken struggle between Reuben and Judah also concerns the primogeniture. Among Jacob's own children, the struggle for the birthright leads to greater hostility than the rivalry between Esau and himself. But there is no expressed concern in the text that some of his children will be rejected from the path of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The brothers de-

to JE. In fact, the difference between the blessings lies not in their style but their content. The blessing in ch. 28 was designed to single Abraham out from the other nations. When Isaac transfers the blessing of Abraham to Jacob, he is choosing him, not his brothers. This is not the case with ch. 27, which scholars ascribe to JE: this blessing is of a different nature altogether; it is the firstborn's blessing. Therefore, these should not be perceived as alternate blessings from different sources. Moreover, the initiative to send Jacob to Haran comes from Rebecca in 27:46, which is ascribed to JE, so the division into different sources lack narrative continuity. Skinner says that this is an addition of R. Today, however, many hold that the entire chapter is from a single source. See P. Volz and W. Rudolph, *Der Elohist als Erzähler ein Irrweg der Pentateuchkritik? An der Genesis erläutert*, BZAW 63 (Giessen: Alfred Töpelmann, 1933), 61–70; Westermann, *Genesis*, 436.

25. Steinmetz argues that the story of the blessing in ch. 27 is a personal gift that Isaac wishes to give Esau, and the family inheritance is not at stake here. Steinmetz, *From Father to Son*, 40.

26. Concerning the status of the firstborn in the Bible and Ancient Near East, see I. Mendelsohn, "On the Preferential Status of the Eldest Son," *BASOR* 156 (1959): 38–40; M. Tsevat, "בכור," *TDOT* 2:121–27.

27. See, for example, Spina, "The Face of God," 11–12.

ceive their father and plot to kill Joseph, just as Esau schemes to kill Jacob. Joseph is sold into slavery and is thus driven from the family. The factor which seems to contribute to Esau's repudiation, as we saw, is his marriage to Canaanite wives. But the same act does not result in Judah's rejection; even though he marries a Canaanite woman and she bears him sons, he is still a dominant member of Jacob's family. In general, Jacob's sons are not rejected from the family for any of their sins. Projecting this onto the generation before, there is no reason to assume that Isaac is concerned that one of his twin sons will be rejected. Although Jacob receives the blessing intended for Esau, Esau also receives a similar blessing.[28] The fact that Esau is also blessed reinforces the theory that Isaac considers both sons his successors; the only difference is that Jacob, rather than Esau, claims the status of the firstborn. It is our mistake as readers to project our own preconception of the familiar story onto the text, and the narrative's ending upon its beginning, rather than let the story speak for itself.

Before he sends Jacob to Haran, Isaac bestows him with Abraham's blessing, the covenant between God and the chosen people. The text never clarifies precisely whether the character Isaac internalizes that Jacob is his sole inheritor. There are, however, wider, more substantial gaps in the reader's knowledge than this omission. Does the fact that Jacob receives Abraham's blessing necessarily mean that Esau has been rejected?

Isaac's Transmission of Abraham's Blessing to Jacob

This chapter will explore whether each character is presented as cognizant of the issue of selection and rejection in the narrative following Isaac's deception. How should Isaac and Rebecca's course of action be interpreted? How does the narrative characterize Jacob's state of mind after this twisted tale of transaction, theft, and deception? Is Isaac's blessing a manifestation of Jacob's selection, and how is this blessing interpreted by father and son?

Let us first reconstruct the sequence of events according to a widely accepted reading. God's prophecy to Rebecca concludes with these words: "The elder shall serve the younger" (25:23). The accepted interpretation of this verse is that the elder son shall serve the younger son.[29] Indeed, Jacob is chosen, while Esau is not. Within this interpretive paradigm, Jacob's status as chosen son becomes evident at the end of the drama of ch. 27, when Isaac blesses Jacob before his departure to Haran:

> May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and numerous, that you may become a company of peoples. May He give to you the blessing

28. See Anderson, who analyses the verses and their interpretation and shows that Esau is also blessed: B. A. Anderson, *Brotherhood and Inheritance: A Canonical Reading of the Esau and Edom Traditions*, LHBOTS 556 (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2011), 56–82.

29. Preference of the younger son is a central biblical motif, widely discussed in literature. For an analysis of different approaches of the subject, see E. Fox, "Stalking the Younger Brother: Some Models for Understanding a Biblical Motif," *JSOT* 60 (1963): 45–68.

> of Abraham, to you and to your offspring with you, so that you may take possession of the land where you now live—land that God gave to Abraham. (Gen 28:3–4)

In this blessing, Isaac explicitly states that Abraham's blessing will be passed on to Jacob, who has been elected as the father of the chosen nation. This blessing closes the narrative circle opened with the mention of Abraham at the beginning of the narrative, "Abraham was the father of Isaac" (25:19). I have discussed earlier how this statement confirms that Isaac is Abraham's successor, while anticipating the question of Isaac's own heir. After a long struggle between the brothers, the bestowal of Abraham's blessing determines that Jacob will be the next link in the chain of Abraham and Isaac's dynasty, and indicates that the fight for this status has come to an end. In my opinion, this explains the inclusion of the puzzling clause in 25:19. Abraham's blessing, received by Jacob, concludes the "These are the descendants of Isaac" narrative that introduces the story of the struggle between the brothers. At this point in the story, at the beginning of ch. 28, the narrative is saturated with familiar themes and expressions related to the semantic field of inheritance. Isaac sends Jacob to Padan-Aram, to Rebecca's family, to find a wife, repeating the actions of Abraham (ch. 24). He warns Jacob not to take a Canaanite woman for a wife, just as Abraham instructs his servant (24:3). Isaac has designated Jacob as his heir, and his instructions draw attention to the fact that Esau has actually done the opposite of what Abraham and Isaac command. His marriage with daughters of the land has disqualified him from being the forefather of the chosen nation.[30] Esau's contempt for the birthright is certainly an early indication of his unworthiness.[31] His scheme to kill Jacob, as opposed to his father's blessing that "you shall serve your brother" (27:40)—so reminiscent of Cain's murder of his brother Abel[32]—may also contribute to his disqualification.

Esau also understands this. After Jacob is sent away to find a wife, Esau notes his father's reservations toward Canaanite women and marries the daughter of Ishmael. He does not take this step immediately after his first marriages, which greatly upset his parents, but only at the end of the story, when Jacob is chosen and sent to Padan-Aram. His marriage to Mahalath, the daughter of Ishmael, can be read as an attempt to win back his father's favor, to reenter the scene after Jacob receives Abraham's blessing.[33] This act reflects Esau's recognition that his marriage was problematic and his desire to fix what had been broken.

All this is one way of understanding this episode. I will now present a different paradigm of this narrative, one that suggests that Jacob's status

30. Sarna, *Genesis*, 189; Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis,* 106; Wenham, *Genesis*, 205. Steinmetz, *From Father to Son,* 97.
31. Sarna, *Genesis*, 189.
32. Turner, *Genesis*, 122.
33. See also ibid., 123–24.

as the chosen son is not at all clear at this point; least of all to Jacob. The sensitive reader, one who does not project his or her preconceptions onto the text, will not easily accept that Isaac's blessing to Jacob clearly indicates that he is the chosen son.

Let us begin with how Isaac is characterized in this episode. We have already asked if and when the text reveals that Isaac reaches the understanding that Jacob is the chosen son, and what brought him to this realization. Turner answers that once Jacob has received the first blessing, Isaac has no choice but to give him Abraham's blessing as well, and Jacob's departure to Haran to find a wife is a most fitting time to bestow it.[34] This may be, but there is no textual indication of so substantial a change in Isaac's mindset. In fact, the circumstances under which Jacob receives this blessing are initiated by Rebecca, who speaks of her concern for Jacob's marriage as a mere cover for her fear of Esau's murderous rage.

If this would indeed mark the turning point, the moment of Isaac's revelation that Jacob, not Esau, is the chosen son, then one would expect actual narrative focus on this realization, rather than a brief blessing during a hasty departure to Haran.

My proposal that Isaac assumes both sons will succeed him and receive Abraham's blessing, and that the blessing Isaac sought to bestow on Esau was a blessing of the firstborn rather than the chosen son, can be maintained in this scene as well. The language of the text does not imply that Isaac's blessing to Jacob necessarily excludes Esau. Nothing happens at this point that causes him to change his mind, nor is there textual indication of any such change; Isaac's summoning of his son is merely a continuation of the previous chapter. He blesses Jacob not because Esau has been rejected but because Jacob is surely chosen. He now blesses Jacob and not Esau because Jacob is the one leaving for a foreign land, and Isaac's words attempt to strengthen his son's ties to his homeland and his father's household: "so that you may take possession of the land where you now live—land that God gave to Abraham" (28:4). His blessing on the eve of his son's departure wishes to convey that he is not banishing him; on the contrary, he is traveling to fulfil Abraham's blessing of seed.

There is no textual evidence, however, indicating that Isaac is rejecting Esau; moreover, the narrative subtly implies that Jacob does not understand that he, and not Esau, is the chosen son.

Jacob's journey to Haran to find a wife is essentially similar to Abraham's servant's mission. The first journey also begins with emphasis on Abraham's selection by God, the special status of his seed, and the promise that his descendants will inherit the land: "The Lord, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my birth, and who spoke to me and swore to me, 'To your offspring I will give this land,'

34. Ibid., 123.

He will send his angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there" (24:7). Similarly, when Jacob is sent to Haran, there is need to emphasize that this journey is *because* he will succeed his father, *because* he must return to his homeland, rather than an act of expulsion and rejection. Abraham, too, worries that the marriage arranged by the servant will result in Isaac's living in Haran, and he therefore explicitly warns him: "The servant said to him, 'Perhaps the woman may not be willing to follow me to this land; must I then take your son back to the land from which you came?' Abraham said to him, 'See to it that you do not take my son back there'" (24:5–6). Given that Jacob himself is traveling to Haran, the risk that he will remain there is infinitely greater; indeed, we see later on that returning to Canaan is no easy feat, and Jacob must strive to convince his wives to leave their homeland and family and overcome Laban's opposition. Isaac does not bless Jacob because he is the only chosen son; he blesses him because of the special circumstances of his departure.

This reading of Isaac's blessing is also supported by a comparison between God's intervention in Isaac's selection and lack thereof in the story of Jacob's selection. As I have already noted, it is clear that Abraham hopes that both Isaac and Ishmael will follow in his footsteps: when Abraham hears that Sarah will also bear a son, he does not forget the son already born to him: "And Abraham said to God, 'O that Ishmael might live in your sight!'" (17:18). God replies that the son born of Sarah will be the chosen one: "God said, 'No, but your wife Sarah shall bear you a son, and you shall name him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him'" (17:19). Even so, Abraham does not believe that Ishmael has been rejected; he is reluctant to give in to Sarah's demand to banish him from the household after Isaac's birth (21:10). In this story, however, God intervenes and asserts that only Isaac is the chosen son, commanding Abraham to expel Ishmael. This is not the case in the next generation. God does not tell Isaac what to do; there is no divine interference in the struggle between the twins, nor is it declared that only Jacob will succeed their father. The difference between God's intervention in the two narratives is tremendous. This lack of divine intervention does not mean that Isaac must decide whom to select and whom to reject, as most commentators have understood; rather, it means that there is no question of selection at all—no issue of rejection clouds the story in the first place, and this reading is supported by God's passive stance.

Many understand God's words to Rebecca during her pregnancy as a declaration that Jacob is the chosen son: "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples born of you shall be divided; one people shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger" (25:23).[35] A careful reading of this prophecy reveals that here, too, there is no mention of rejection; the younger son shall be the more powerful and win the status of firstborn,

35. For example: Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, 182–83; Westermann, *Genesis*, 2:413.

but this does not entail the elder son's exclusion. The verb "shall serve" merely denotes a certain mastery that the acting firstborn will exercise over his brothers, similar to Jacob's blessing to Judah before his death: "Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons shall bow down before you" (49:8). Joseph also dreams of his brothers bowing down before him (37:6, 9), a dream that is fulfilled 20 years later. The firstborn's status is one of power, as Joseph's brothers imply when they hear of his dreams: "Are you indeed to reign over us? Are you indeed to have dominion over us?" (37:8). A firstborn has certain mastery over his brothers, and Rebecca's prophecy should be read in this sense. The same applies to Isaac's blessing in ch. 27: "Let peoples serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may your mother's sons bow down to you" (27:29). God's prediction that the elder will serve the younger means that the younger son, and not the elder, will be the acting firstborn. This pattern reoccurs throughout the Bible, and it is not an irrefutable statement of Esau's rejection.

God's Blessing to Jacob in Beth-El and Jacob's Vow

God's own opinion is apparently confirmed—not to Isaac, but to Jacob—soon after Jacob receives Abraham's blessing.[36] On the way to Haran, Jacob spends the night at Beth-El, where God appears to him in a dream and promises that Abraham's blessing of seed and land will be fulfilled:

> And the Lord stood beside him and said, "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." (28:13–15)

However, a careful reading of this narrative, 28:10–22, reveals that this blessing, too, does not imply that Jacob is the only chosen son, nor does it necessitate Esau's rejection, as I will discuss below.

The main difficulty in this passage is that, despite God's promise to endow Jacob with the land, multiply his seed, watch over him during his journey, and return him to the promised land, Jacob, upon awakening, makes a vow concerning the very issues that God has just promised:

> Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God." (28:20–21)

36. Fokkelman, *Genesis*, 121.

Why does he make a vow for his own safekeeping and the return to his father's household, if God has just promised to watch over him and see his safe return? The diachronic approach solves this problem by ascribing vv. 13–16 to J and the rest to E,[37] explaining that God's promise and Jacob's vow are from different sources. This is an apt example, however, of how source criticism is liable to distort the sequence and understanding of the text. Rather, in order to understand the verses, it is critical to understand how Jacob's emotional state is subtly configured in the narrative. This can already be sensed in the first verse of the episode: "Jacob left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran" (28:10). There are other instances in the Bible of the root יצא juxtaposed with the root הלך, but the second root always appears in its infinitive form, ללכת. The latter combination always marks the beginning of a journey with emphasis on its destination (for example: Gen 11:31; 12:5; Josh 9:12). Here, however, the verbs are ויצא and וילך. This combination generates focus on the journey itself, hinting at Jacob's psychological state during this journey. First, he travels in the opposite direction to Abraham, who journeyed from Haran to Canaan:

> Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother's son Lot, and all the possessions that they had gathered, and the persons whom they had acquired in Haran; and they *set forth to go* to the land of Canaan. When they had come to the land of Canaan. (12:5)

Second, Jacob is alone. When Abraham sought a wife for Isaac, he sent his servant, rather than Isaac himself, together with 10 loaded camels (24:10). Jacob is alone and empty handed, which emerges from a retroactive description of his journey to Haran: "for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan" (32:10). This is also implied in another verse, in 29:1: "Then Jacob went on his journey and came to the land of the people of the east." The translation "went on his journey," however, is not literal: the Hebrew expression is וישא יעקב רגליו, which literally means "Jacob lifted his feet." The verb נשא, "lift," usually refers to the lifting of objects, as in Gen 42:46; Josh 3:6. The expression used here is unique, and, considering its usual meaning, implies that Jacob has nothing but his own feet to lift.

37. Dillmann, *Genesis*, 2:224–25; Skinner, *Genesis*, 376; Driver, *Genesis*, 264–67. This division is based on the use of the name "God" in the entire section, and the use of "Lord" in vv. 13–16. Additionally, he points out key words that characterize each source; Gunkel, *Genesis*, 308–9. In Keunen's opinion, these verses do not belong to an independent source but were later additions of E, and do not belong to J. See A. Keunen, *A Historical Critical Inquiry into the Origin and Composition of the Hexateuch* (trans. P. H. Wicksteed; London: Macmillan, 1886), 147. Today, scholars are doubtful of this division; see, for example, Blum, *Die Komposition der Vätergeschichte*, 23. Other ways of describing the development of this passage can be found in R. Rendtorff, "Jacob in Bethel: Beobachtungen zum Aufbau und zur Quellenfrage in Gen 28:10–22," *ZAW* 94 (1982): 511–23. Volz and Rudolph already claimed that the story is from one source, J: Volz and Rudolph, *Der Elohist*, 73–78. Weisman claims that this is a source of E's that was redacted by J. Z. Weisman, *From Jacob to Israel* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1986) 64–67 [Hebrew].

Together, these details sketch Jacob's character in a forlorn light. Following his abrupt departure from his father's household, undertaken alone and empty-handed to a foreign land, the newly wandering son may have been seized with the fear that he has just been rejected and expelled from his father's household, while Esau remains in the chosen land with his father and mother. And no wonder, when his deception has just been discovered, sparking his father's resentment; perhaps it occurs to Jacob that his father and Esau seek reprisal for the scheme that he and his mother literally cooked up. These possible doubts may illuminate Jacob's reaction to his nightly vision. Verse 16 relates his sheer wonder at the dream he has just dreamed and God's presence in that place. It may be that his actual revelation has left him reeling; I believe, however, that Jacob is portrayed as reeling in disbelief that God appears to him at all. Jacob's apparently contradictory vow is a reaction to the apparent contradiction that he has just been banished from his father's household and sent away empty-handed like Ishmael, yet received a revelation from his father's God. His words imply his fear that he will never return home, and desperately, ridden with insecurity, Jacob's vow echoes God's promise in the hope that the unexpected divine words will come to pass. His vow does not merely express his acceptance of God's promise; it is a reflection of his psychological state, of his loneliness and fear and rejection.

In this scene, Jacob indeed seems to have been cast into the same role as Ishmael and Abraham's other rejected sons. When God tells Abraham that only Isaac will succeed him, Abraham sends his other sons away, out of Canaan, so that only Isaac remains: "Abraham gave all he had to Isaac. But to the sons of his concubines Abraham gave gifts, while he was still living, and he sent them away from his son Isaac, eastward to the east country" (25:5–6). Now Jacob, too, is sent away, and headed toward the east (29:1), while Esau, beloved to his father, remains with Isaac in their homeland.

The content of the vow also reflects Jacob's fear that he has been rejected from his home, family, and inheritance of God's covenant. He uses the expression "then the Lord shall be my God" (28:21). Some interpret this as part of the condition: if God will be with him, as his God, then he will set up a pillar, a monument. Others explain that, if God will be with him, he will accept Him as his God.[38] Both explanations, especially the second, imply that what concerns Jacob as he flees to Haran is the question of whether God is *his* God, whether his departure excludes him from

38. This explanation bothered many scholars, who did not believe it likely that Jacob would make conditions for accepting God. See, for example, V. P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 18–50*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,1995), 248. These scholars, however, did not take into consideration that Jacob fears that he has been rejected from his father's family and the covenant with God. Therefore, if we take this into consideration, it is not only possible that Jacob agrees to accept God only after he has been returned to his land but even reasonable.

Table 1. Jacob's Vow and God's Promise

God's Promise (15)	*Jacob's Vow (20–21)*
Know that I am with you	If God will be with me,
and will keep you wherever you go,	and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear
and will bring you back to this land;	so that I come again to my father's house in peace,
for I will not leave you	then the Lord shall be my God
until I have done what I have promised you.	

Abraham's covenant. Therefore, if he does return, Jacob vows, he will accept his father's God as his God, perpetuating the covenant between them.

A careful comparison of Jacob's vow to God's promise reveals the depths of Jacob's despair (see table 1). First, it is worth emphasizing the similarity between God's promise and Jacob's vow, similarity which challenges the perception that the verses originate from two different sources. Jacob's words echo God's, with three significant differences. First, Jacob mentions food and clothing: God speaks of general sustenance, while Jacob's specification reflects fear for his daily existence, his very bread and clothing. Another difference is that Jacob declares that "the Lord shall be my God," which is unparalleled in God's promise. We have already seen how this expresses Jacob's fear of exclusion from his forefathers' covenant with God. Finally, Jacob's mention of his father's household reveals the fear that he has been ousted from his family. God promises that he will be brought back to the *land*; Jacob's words imply that he wishes to come again to his *father's house*, in peace. The land God refers to is surely a metonym for his home, and vice versa, an expression emphasizing that Jacob's trip is temporary; that he is still considered a native of Abraham's ultimate destination. Jacob's specific mention of his father's house conveys the fear that he has just been rejected from his father's household, never to return, despite his father's blessing in 28:4.

This understanding allows us to appreciate how the minutiae of the text deftly reflect a character's emotional world. Insight is garnered through details as subtle as the employment of different divine names and Jacob's use of the second and third person in relation to God. Scholars of source criticism ascribe the different names of God to different sources, while others claim that different names have different meanings. For example, use of the name *Elohim*, typically translated "God," might express certain distance; while the Tetragrammaton, typically translated "Lord," conveys

greater closeness.[39] God appears to Jacob using the special name, ה' (v. 13). Jacob's initial reaction is surprise and wonder at the Lord's revelation to him: "Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, 'Surely *the Lord* is in this place—and I did not know it!'" (28:16). This wonder immediately gives way to fear, which is aptly conveyed with use of the name God: "And he was afraid, and said, 'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of *God*, and this is the gate of heaven'" (28:17). Jacob's sense of distance from God is also expressed in his vow, which, as mentioned, stems from anxiety and doubt. The beginning of his vow relates to God in the third person (and uses the name *God*), but once he mentions the conditions that he hopes will be fulfilled, Jacob makes a direct appeal: "and of all that you give me I will surely give one-tenth to you" (28:22). Jacob's language hints that once he returns to his land and his father's house, he will develop a closer, more direct relationship with his father's God.[40]

We can now reassess the blessing that God gives to Jacob in Beth-El with new perspective. If, like most readers, we disregard how the narrative adroitly portrays Jacob's psychological state, then the struggle between Jacob and Esau apparently reaches a climax when Jacob deceives Isaac; Jacob's position as chosen son is resolved soon after, when Isaac blesses Jacob with Abraham's blessing before he leaves for Haran, and is confirmed with God's revelation to him at Beth-El. If, however, the narrative never presents Isaac as a father forced to choose between his sons, if his character presumes that both of his sons will succeed him and his blessing to Jacob before his departure is merely bestowed to ensure his son's return, while Jacob in contrast is portrayed as a son believing he is banished while his father stays behind with his favored son, then God's appearance to Jacob in Beth-El can also be read within this paradigm. What is at stake is not Jacob's selection after Esau has been rejected but whether Jacob remains a chosen son of his father even after he has been sent away, though Esau remains at home. Even God's promise does not negate Esau's status as coheir of Isaac; it serves only to ensure that Jacob has not been rejected. From Jacob's perspective, the revelation at Beth-El does not concern Esau; it is solely concerned with the question of Jacob's return home. This is the position the reader must adopt, because at this point, the reader, like Jacob, knows only that Jacob has left his home, doubtful whether he will return, while Esau remains in Canaan. This episode relates not to Esau's position within Isaac's household but to Jacob's. I am not claiming that at Beth-El, God is *not* choosing Jacob as the chosen son out of the two brothers, or even that Isaac has *not* chosen him. I am claiming that the reader is not equipped to determine this at this point in the story. The narrative is not at

39. U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1990 [Hebrew], 32.

40. Hamilton, *Genesis 18–50*, 249.

all concerned with Esau's rejection but with whether Jacob is still considered a chosen son, even though he must leave the promised land.

This episode concludes with Jacob's vow; a condition as of yet unfulfilled. Chapter 29 opens with Jacob continuing on his way to Haran, referred to as the "people of the east" (29:1), a description that might reflect Jacob's perspective that he is going backwards. Jacob's origin is his ultimate destination, and through the language of his vow, the text deftly presents his fear that he will never return. The narrative concludes with this vow, not with additional words of encouragement from God. This open ending is designed to leave the question of Jacob's return open, a question that will haunt the ensuing chapters of his saga—will he return, according to God and Isaac's promise, or will his fears be realized?[41] For the next eight chapters, until Joseph becomes the narrative protagonist, the text is concerned with the question of Jacob's return.

The next chapter will explore how complicated and complex this return proves to be and how slowly, gradually, Jacob returns to his land, to his homeland, to his father's household.

The Long Way Home

The starting point of the Jacob cycle is given to scholarly dispute. Most hold that Jacob's story begins in 25:19.[42] However, because Isaac exits the scene and is no longer an independent character as of 28:9, another possibility is that Jacob's own story begins in 28:10. Regardless of this question, Jacob clearly begins to operate as protagonist after he receives his father's blessing in 28:1–4. It is therefore reasonable to delineate 28:10 until ch. 36 as Jacob's narrative unit, for at this point Isaac steps down from the stage and leaves him in the spotlight. The main impression garnered from the vast amount of scholarship written about this unit is that the conflict between Jacob and Esau is over by the end of ch. 27, when Isaac chooses Jacob, a choice that is authorized by God in ch. 28,[43] while the ensuing chapters describe the history of his growing family, which evolves into the tribes of Israel. Over the next few pages, I wish to show that this approach, while not actually incorrect, falls far short of explaining these chapters. A careful exploration of this unit, its structure, and the analogies within it will show that this story, which begins with Jacob's journey *to* Haran, is entirely concerned with the question of his return *from* Haran. The story of his departure, beginning in 27:10, raises the question of whether or not Jacob is a chosen son, and whether or not he will return home. Chapters 29–36, I will show, each present a stage of his return, affirming his cho-

41. As opposed to Wenham, who presents matters differently. In his opinion, this hiatus anticipates what is to come: Jacob's return to the land, regardless of what happens in the meantime. Wenham, *Genesis*, 223.

42. Skinner, *Genesis*, 355; Gunkel, *Genesis*, 286; Westermann, *Genesis,* 407.

43. Dillmann, *Genesis,* 2:224. And see H. C. White, *Narration and Discourse in the Book of Genesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 230–31.

Table 2. Jacob's Return-to-Canaan Language

Genesis 31	*Genesis 28*
(3) Then the Lord said to Jacob, "*Return to the land of your ancestors and to your kindred*, and I will be with you. . . (5) And said to them, "I see that your father does not regard me as favorably as he did before. *But the God of my father has been with me* . . . (7) . . . but God did not permit him to harm me. (13) I am the God of Bethel, where *you anointed a pillar* And *vowed a vow* to Me. Now leave this land at once and *return* to the land of your birth.	(15) Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and *will bring you back to this land*; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you. (18) So Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar . . . (20) *Then Jacob made a vow*, saying, "*If God will be with me*, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, (21) so that *I come again to my father's house in peace,* then the Lord shall be my God (22) and this stone, *which I have set up for a pillar*, shall be God's house.

sen status, while the fact that Esau is rejected gradually but clearly emerges in parallel. This analysis is based on the general structure of these verses, which is in constant, repetitive dialogue with the story of Jacob's departure to Haran in 28:11–22.[44]

The First Stage: "Know That I Am with You and Will Keep You Wherever You Go, and Will Bring You Back to This Land" (28:15)

The story of Jacob's return to Canaan naturally relates to the story of his departure from Canaan. After yet another conflict erupts between Laban and Jacob, God instructs him to return to his homeland (31:3). Jacob then turns to Rachel and Leah and speaks to them using language that recalls his night at Beth-El, 28:10–22 (see table 2).

The Second Stage: "And the Angels of God Met Him" (32:1)

After Jacob and his family flee, Laban pursues and overtakes them, and the two form a covenant. This narrative (31:44–32:2) is also in clear dialogue with the story of the dream in Beth-El (see table 3).[45]

44. Fishbane's chiastic structure of the entire Jacob Cycle, 25:19–35:22, is unconvincing. M. Fishbane, "Composition and Structure in the Jacob Cycle (Gen. 25:19–35:22," *JSS* 26 (1975): 15–38.

45. I am convinced that Jacob's encounter with the angels in 32:1–2 belongs to the conclusion of Jacob's meeting with Laban (as is Dillmann, *Genesis*, 2:270–71; Sarna, *Genesis*, 223; Wenham, *Genesis*, 266), rather than to the beginning of Jacob's encounter with

Table 3. Covenant and the Dream in Beth-El

Genesis 31:44–32:2	*Genesis 38*
(44) Come now, let us make a covenant, you and I; and let it be a witness between you and me." (45) *So Jacob took a stone, and set it up as a pillar.* (46) And Jacob said to his kinsfolk, "Gather stones," and they took stones, and made a heap; and they ate there by the heap. (47) Laban called it Jegar-sahadutha, but Jacob called it Galeed. (53) . . . *So Jacob swore* by the Fear of his father Isaac . . . (32:1) Jacob went on his way *and the angels of God met him*; (2) and when Jacob saw them he said, "This is God's camp!" *So he called that place Mahanaim.*	(11) He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. *Taking one of the stones of the place*, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. (12) And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth . . . *and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.* (18) So Jacob rose early in the morning, *and he took the stone* that he had put under his head *and set it up for a pillar* and poured oil on the top of it. (19) *He called that place Bethel* . . . (20) *Then Jacob made a vow*, saying, "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, (21) so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God.

The parallel between the two visions of God's angels is striking.[46] Moreover, in both places, Jacob takes stones and sets them up as a pillar, as a monument; in both places, Jacob gives the place a name; in both places, Jacob makes an oath or vow. These analogies create a strong connection between the moment before Jacob leaves Canaan for Haran and the moment before he leaves Haran for Canaan. His departure clearly reflects his return.[47]

Esau, as Fokkelman believes (*Narrative Art in Genesis*, 197). In Skinner's opinion (*Genesis,* 405) and Gunkel's (*Genesis*, 342–43), this is an independent unit or a transitional unit, as claims Westermann, *Genesis*, 2:504.

46. Regarding the connection between these verses and the revelation at Beth-El, see Dillmann, *Genesis*, 2:270; C. Houtman, "Jacob at Mahanaim: Some Remarks on Genesis xxxii 2–3," *VT* 28 (1978): 37–44.

47. Scholars found duplicity in this narrative: there are explanations for two names, Gal-Ed and Mizpeh; there is erection of both a monument and a pile ("Gal") of stones; there is mention of eating twice during the covenant ceremony; and there are two subjects in the covenant: that Jacob will not harm Laban's daughters, or pass the pile of stones with harmful intent; twice, God is witness. This convinced some scholars that this narrative is a combination of two sources, J and E. The verses are not easily divided into sources, however, and different divisions have been suggested. See Skinner, *Genesis*, 399. Gunkel points out the problems of dividing the passage into two sources, Gunkel, *Genesis*, 339–40. Hamilton is against division into sources, *Genesis*, 312–13.

Table 4. Jacob's Approach to Canaan and Vow in Beth-El

Genesis 33	*Genesis 28*
Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, on his way from Paddan-aram; and he camped before the city . . . (20) *There he erected an altar and called it El-Elohe-Israel.*	(18) So Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put under his head *and set it up for a pillar* and poured oil on the top of it. (19) *He called that place Bethel* (20) Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go . . . (21) *so that I come again to my father's house in peace*, then the LORD shall be my God (22) and this stone, *which I have set up for a pillar*, shall be God's house . . .

The Third Stage: "So That I Come Again . . . in Peace" (28:21)

Jacob is approaching Canaan and sends delegations to Esau in an attempt to appease him, preparing himself for their first meeting in 20 years. Though the narrative presents Jacob's grave inhibitions about the reunion, these expectations are exceeded—the brothers display affection, even though Jacob, on his part, is cautious—and the episode ends peacefully with Esau's return to Seir and Jacob's arrival at Shechem. His arrival recalls the wording of his vow in Beth-El on his way to Haran (table 4).

Upon his departure to Haran, the fear that he will never return to his father's house in peace is reflected in a condition in his vow: "so that I come again to my father's house in peace (בשלום)" (28:21). When Jacob returns to Canaan and arrives at the city of Shechem, the text echoes his vow: "Jacob came safely (שלם)" (33:18).[48] When he leaves for Haran, he builds a monument, and names the place of revelation Beth-El, meaning "the house of God." Upon his safe return, he also builds a monument and gives it a similar name: "El-Elohe-Israel" (33:20). With these acts, Jacob closes a third circle that began with his escape from Canaan 20 years earlier; but this is not the final circle he will close.

The Fourth Stage: "Arise, Go Up to Bethel" (35:1)

Chapter 34 imparts the story of Dinah's rape. In ch. 35, God commands Jacob to go up to Beth-El, the site of Jacob's revelation before he left for Haran. The text emphasizes the connection between the two events: "God said to Jacob, 'Arise, go up to Bethel, and settle there. Make an altar there

48. See also Dillmann, *Genesis*, 2:291; Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 229. The Samarian version is שלום. Others have interpreted שלם as a place name. See Rashbam; Westermann, *Genesis*, 2:258.

to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau'" (35:1). The two sources are irrefutably connected (see table 5).[49]

In ch. 35, Jacob builds an altar once again, and renames the site "Beth-El" (35:7, 15), the same name he gave after the first revelation (28:19). He builds a monument there both times and pours oil on both (28:18; 35:14). The first time, God promises the land to him and his descendants and describes how his seed will multiply (18:13–14); these promises are repeated during the second revelation (35:11–12). The first revelation at Beth-El begins with God "standing beside him" (28:13); during the second, the opposite is stated: "Then God went up from him" (35:13).

This is no usual, implicit textual analogy; the second revelation refers explicitly to the first, saliently duplicating many of its elements. The first revelation is a story of promises: God promises Jacob that he will return to the land and that his seed will multiply. The second revelation echoes the first because the promises are being fulfilled, and in acknowledgement of this fulfillment Jacob reenacts the same motions: he sets up a monument, anoints it with oil, and (re)names the site Beth-El. In a sense, by building an altar, Jacob is fulfilling some of the conditions of his vow. This is the fourth, most momentous stage of his return home. But it is not the final *inclusio*.

The Fifth Stage: "So That I Come Again to My Father's House in Peace" (28:21)

The closing of the fifth circle contains the most subtle, the most minor parallel, but this subtlety lends it its fascination. The second revelation in Beth-El is followed by the death of Rachel, and the story of Jacob's journey is all but complete, concluding with a list of the sons born to him. Finally, with anticlimactic, laconic brevity, the text relates that Jacob arrives at his father's home:

> Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre, or Kiriath-arba, that is, Hebron, where Abraham and Isaac had resided. (35:27)

This verse is the fulfillment of Jacob's vow at the revelation in Beth-El:

> Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God. (28:20–21)

Jacob is finally reunited with his father, decades after Isaac sent him to find a wife in Haran. His vow has been fulfilled; Jacob has returned home.

49. See also Hamilton, *Genesis*, 2:382. Westermann claims that this story concludes that of the first revelation at Beth-El. Westermann, *Genesis*, 2:550. On the connection between the two sources, see also Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 231–35; Anderson, *Brotherhood and Inheritance*, 122.

Table 5. Jacob at Beth-El

Genesis 35	*Genesis 28*
(1) God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel, and settle there. Make an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau" . . .	(19) He called that place Bethel; but the name of the city was *Luz* at the first.
(3) Then come, let us go up to Bethel, that I may make an altar there to the God who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone". . .	(12) And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.
(6) Jacob came to *Luz*, that is, Bethel, which is in the land of Canaan . . .	(13) *And the* Lord *stood beside him and said, "I am the* Lord*, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring;*
(7) *and there he built an altar and called the place El-bethel, because it was there that God had revealed Himself to him when he fled from his brother . . .*	(14) *and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south*; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring.
(9) God appeared to Jacob again when he came from Paddan-aram, and he blessed him.	(18) So Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put under his head *and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it.*
(10) God said to him, "Your name is Jacob; no longer shall you be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name." So he was called Israel.	(19) *He called that place Bethel*; but the name of the city was Luz at the first.
(11) *God said to him*, "I am God Almighty: be *fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall come from you*, and kings shall spring from you.	(22) *and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house*; and of all that You give me I will surely give one-tenth to You."
(12) *The land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to your offspring after you."*	
(13) *Then God went up from* him at the place where He had spoken with him.	
(14) *Jacob set up a pillar in the place where He had spoken with him, a pillar of stone*; *and he poured out a drink offering on it, and poured oil on it.*	
(15) *So Jacob called the place where God had spoken with him Bethel.*	

The Significance of the Process of Jacob's Return

What is the meaning of this structure? Why is the process of Jacob's return spread out over so many episodes, rather than condensed into a single story?

Each stage of Jacob's return expresses a particular motif, a particular aspect of his journey back, and each stage marks a different hurdle his character overcomes. I will now recapitulate the different stages, with reference to the motif and specific hurdle that characterizes each.

The *first stage* is Jacob's decision to leave Haran (31:1–15). This decision has clear parallels to the story of Jacob's departure from Canaan, when God appears to him in Beth-El. This stage takes place in Haran and is catalyzed by two factors. The first is the tension that arises between Laban's sons and Jacob when Jacob grows wealthy from working with Laban's flock, as well as Laban's changed attitude toward Jacob (31:1–2). The second is God's command to return to his homeland, the land of his fathers (31:3). Jacob is convinced, but the question is whether his wives—who are Laban's daughters, and have always lived in Aram—will agree to return with him. Jacob constructs a careful rhetoric to persuade them,[50] openly admitting that their father's attitude toward him has changed, but emphasizes that these changes are not his fault. His speech underscores his own innocence and Laban's devious attempts to cheat him. He does not stop here; he reveals that he managed to earn such profits at Laban's expense through guidance from an angel who appeared to him in a dream, thus removing all accountability from himself (31: 4–12). Jacob also explains that God has obligated him to return; furthermore, he must fulfill the vow he made in Beth-El to return to his homeland (31:13). Jacob's lengthy speech to his wives, and the effort he puts into his rhetoric, convey how difficult it is for him to leave Haran and how deeply entrenched his family is in that place.

A fortiori, Abraham anticipates such difficulty in a less complicated situation: when he sends his servant to find Isaac a wife in Haran, he commands the servant to swear that he will not bring his son back there (24:5–8), a situation the servant himself conjectures: "Perhaps the woman may not be willing to follow me to this land" (24:5). Alhough Jacob's anxiety is clearly conveyed, Rachel and Leah consent immediately; it emerges that the daughters of Laban have also been suffering from their father's attitude toward them (31:4–16).

This stage of Jacob's return marks the fulfillment of his father's wish: that he marries worthy wives. Moreover, it also describes that part of Jacob's vow and God's promise have been fulfilled as well:

> Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go. . . . Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear. (28:15, 20)

God promises to watch over Jacob, who asks for this safekeeping in the more specific, palpable form of food and clothing. This is the subject of ch. 31: Jacob is not merely fed and clothed; he is given great wealth as well, which he attributes to God's providence:

> Yet your father has cheated me and changed my wages ten times, but God did not permit him to harm me. If he said, "The speckled shall be your

50. Regarding rhetorical techniques in Jacob's persuasive words to his wives, see Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 152–57.

> wages," then all the flock bore speckled. . . . And [the angel] said, "Look up and see that all the goats that leap on the flock are striped, speckled, and mottled; for I have seen all that Laban is doing to you." (31:7–12)

Rachel and Leah's response also raises the subject of wealth:

> Then Rachel and Leah answered him, "Is there any portion or inheritance left to us in our father's house? Are we not regarded by him as foreigners? For he has sold us, and he has been using up the money given for us. All the property that God has taken away from our father belongs to us and to our children; now then, do whatever God has said to you." (vv. 14–16)

In addition to all of this, God's command to him, "Then the Lord said to Jacob, 'Return to the land of your ancestors and to your kindred, and I will be with you'" (31:3) is a fulfillment of God's promise to Jacob in Beth-El, on the eve of his departure to Haran: "Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you" (28:15).[51]

This narrative, which is connected to God's revelation to Jacob in Beth-El, illustrates double fulfillment: of Jacob's marriage to Rachel and Leah, and of great wealth granted to him. These two achievements show that he has persuaded his wives and family to leave their homeland for his own homeland, triumphing over Laban's greed and deceit.

Also in dialogue with his revelation at Beth-El, the *second stage* of Jacob's return transpires after he has fled with his family and possessions to the hills of Gilead, on the border of Canaan. Laban learns of Jacob's escape and pursues him, but God appears to Laban in a dream, warning him against taking action (31:24, 29). In contrast to Laban's original evil intentions, the episode ends with a covenant between Laban and Jacob. God's nocturnal appearance, Jacob's encounter with angels, his erection of a monument, and the naming account all tie this narrative to the incident at Beth-El. This second evocative narrative reflects a second stage of Jacob's return home. Jacob manages to escape from Laban, but will he successfully break his ties with that place? Jacob has left Haran, but is Haran "willing" to leave him and his family in peace? The text grapples with this question, emphasizing Laban's professed positive attitude toward his family and his supposed connection with them:

> Laban said to Jacob, "What have you done? You have deceived me, and carried away my daughters like captives of the sword. Why did you flee secretly and deceive me and not tell me? I would have sent you away with mirth and songs, with tambourine and lyre. And why did you not permit me to kiss my sons and my daughters farewell? What you have done is foolish. . . . Then Laban answered and said to Jacob, "The daughters are my daughters, the children are my children, the flocks are my flocks, and all that you see is mine. But what can I do today about these daughters of mine, or about their children whom they have borne? (31:26–28, 43)

51. Ibid., 152.

Jacob explains that he fled in fear that Laban would take his daughters away from him: "Jacob answered Laban, 'Because I was afraid, for I thought that you would take your daughters from me by force'" (31:31). The narrative concludes with the establishment of a covenant between them;[52] a covenant that, unsurprisingly, creates a clear distinction between Jacob's family and Laban's family, to the point of marking the boundary between them:

> Then Laban said to Jacob, "See this heap and see the pillar, which I have set between you and me. This heap is a witness, and the pillar is a witness, that I will not pass beyond this heap to you, and you will not pass beyond this heap and this pillar to me, for harm. (31:51–52)

This distinction is also expressed through the monument's double name: Laban's appellation is Aramean, while Jacob's is Hebrew. The boundary marks two separate entities in two different languages. This is an exclusive example of the different languages to which the forefathers were exposed, and it is no coincidence that this issue comes to a head here. Even though Jacob knows Aramean, the boundary is given two different names, which emphasizes the distinction between the two entities it marks: "Laban called it Jegar-Sahadutha, but Jacob called it Galeed" (31:47).

Jacob also underscores the religious distinction between the entities; each area has a different deity: "May the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor—the God of their father—judge between us" (31:53).

The encounter between Laban and Jacob establishes the border between Laban the Aramean and Jacob the Hebrew. They speak different languages and serve different gods. This narrative marks the fission between the family of Laban and the family of Jacob. As he does in Beth-El, Jacob builds a monument, names it, and also encounters angels of God.[53] This marks Jacob's true departure from Haran.

The *third stage* of Jacob's return is concerned with his reentry into Canaan. After Jacob has overcome the possibility that his wives may wish to remain behind, and after he has parted ways with Laban, Jacob arrives in Canaan, where he must deal with Esau. This confrontation takes place at the river Jabbok and is not unexpected. After all, Rebecca initiates Jacob's journey to Haran in order to keep him away from Esau, who expresses murderous intentions. Although she says that she will send for him soon after his brother's wrath dissipates, this never transpires, and the reader is never told why; perhaps Esau's anger never passes. Jacob's preparations for their encounter certainly indicate that he still fears his brother's wrath (32:7), and the fact that Esau approaches with four hundred men seems to confirm Jacob's worst fears.

52. Regarding similar elements in the covenant ritual here, see D. J. McCarthy, "Three Covenants in Genesis," *CBQ* 26 (1964): 179–89.

53. Regarding the connection between the event at Mahanaim and the revelation in Beth-El, see also Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 190–92, 198.

Jacob articulates desire to return home in peace, and God promises his safe arrival both when he flees Canaan (28:15) and when he leaves Haran many years later (31:3). His words to Laban seem to confirm his belief in God's promise (31:42). But now, upon his return, the narrative portrays Jacob's tremendous fear (32:7). He divides his camp in order to minimize damage in case of attack. Even though his return is a fulfillment of God's word; accompanied by God's promise, as is evident from his triumphant emergence from his conflict with Laban, he lowers himself and glorifies Esau. He repeatedly addresses Esau as "my lord" (32:4, 5) and bows down before him (33:3). Jacob likens meeting Esau to meeting God (33:10), showers him with gifts, and expresses gratitude when they are accepted: "since you have received me with such favor" (v. 10). Jacob retains this attitude even after Esau treats him like a brother (33:9). Evidently, Jacob is not yet confident of his safety.

Jacob's fears are proven wrong. His reunion with Esau is emotional: Esau runs to meet him, embraces him, and falls on his neck and weeps (33:4). Twenty years have passed since their parting, and Esau is moved not to anger but to tears. There is no hint in the text to any insincerity on Esau's part, and Jacob's trepidation is unsubstantiated.

But Esau arrives with 400 men. Is there any clue in the narrative to his original intentions—did he mean to harm him? Whether he brought them with no malicious intent or whether he planned to attack, but then changed his mind, it is unclear what caused this change: Jacob's gifts may have served to appease, or the sight of Jacob's large family may have influenced him. Another possibility may be related to Jacob's struggle with a stranger at the Jabbok, which ended with Jacob's triumph, blessing, and change of name—divine intervention may have affected the nature of the confrontation with Esau, just as God prevented Laban from harming him. Regardless of what served to quench his anger, their reunion is warm and demonstrative. It may be no coincidence that Jacob wishes to bless his twin: "'Please accept my gift that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have everything I want.' So he urged him, and he took it" (33:11). Perhaps Jacob's insistent bestowal is an attempt to restore the blessing he once took from him.[54]

Just like Jacob's confrontation with Laban, the brothers' meeting leads the reader to wonder about the nature of the ensuing relationship. Will this affectionate display of brotherhood reunite them into one family? Esau shows keen interest in rekindling their kinship: he offers to join Jacob (33:12) or to send some of his men to Jacob's camp (33:15). But Jacob evades both offers, claiming he will join him in Seir: "Let my lord pass on ahead of his servant, and I will lead on slowly, according to the pace of the

54. See also Alter, *Genesis*, 186; Sarna, *Genesis*, 230; Anderson, *Brotherhood and Inheritance,* 119.

cattle that are before me and according to the pace of the children, until I come to my lord in Seir" (33:14).

Yet the reader learns that while Esau immediately returns to Seir, Jacob—despite his words—continues to Succoth, and then to Shechem, never venturing out to Seir. The meaning of this maneuver is never resolved in the narrative, although their meeting does show that Esau's hatred for Jacob has dissipated.[55] The narrative sequence implies that Jacob does not welcome Esau's company, perhaps because he still fears him, possibly justifiably.[56] Or perhaps Jacob seeks to enter Canaan alone in order to be the sole receptacle of God's blessing.[57]

Jacob's construction of a house in Succoth raises several questions.[58] It is unclear why he does not continue directly to Canaan and his father's house in Hebron. The reason for his delay is unclear, but it seems to be related to his exchange with Esau. He may linger in Succoth because he fears that Esau will resent his direct journey to Canaan. If this is the case, then the narrative's report that Jacob arrives safely in Shechem (33:18) is related to Jacob's fear of crossing to the western bank of the Jordan.

Following Jacob's travels from Succoth to Shechem, the text relates, 33:18–20:

> Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, on his way from Paddan-aram; and he camped before the city. And from the sons of Hamor, Shechem's father, he bought for 100 pieces of money the plot of land on which he had pitched his tent. There he erected an altar and called it El-Elohe-Israel.

This is yet another allusion to God's revelation to Jacob in Beth-El, where God promises his safe return to Canaan and Jacob adds: "so that I come again . . . in peace." With Jacob's arrival in Shechem, his first stop within Canaanite borders, God's promise is fulfilled: "I will bring you back to this land." Jacob immediately purchases land as an expression of this fulfillment, as Abraham does when he buys land in Canaan (Gen 23). He then erects a monument on it, just like Abraham (Gen 12:7–8; 13:18; 22:9), and Isaac (26:25).[59] His safe arrival in Shechem marks the end of the tension

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55. Coats sees this as an anticlimax to the story of the brother's reunion, see G. W. Coats, "Strife without Reconciliation: A Narrative Theme in the Jacob Traditions," in *Werden und Wirken des Alten Testaments: Festschrift für Claus Westermann zum 70 Geburtztag*, ed. R. Albertz et al. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980), 103. See also J. Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 118.

56. See also Skinner, *Genesis*, 412.

57. See Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 228–29.

58. Westermann believes that this statement is a settlement formula, which expresses that the journey is at an end: the traveler arrives in Canaan and then builds a permanent home, which anticipates the end of the wanderings in the desert. Westermann, *Genesis*, 2:527.

59. Hamilton, *Genesis*, 2:349.

that has plagued Jacob ever since his departure: will Esau allow him to return?[60] Another condition of Jacob's vow has been fulfilled; Jacob has reached Shechem in peace.[61]

This is the third time that the text alludes to the revelation at Beth-El. The first two instances concerned Jacob's departure from Haran; the third involves Jacob's meeting with Esau and the return to Canaan. Jacob reaches his homeland safely, without any conflict with Esau. Two stages remain before Jacob comes full circle.

The *fourth stage* is marked by Jacob's summoning to Beth-El (35:1), where God first appeared to him. Jacob's return to that site is not merely symbolic. There is profound significance in God's second revelation to Jacob and the renewal of the blessing of seed and land taking place on the same ground. The close ties between the two revelations have been explicated above. Once again, God bestows Abraham's blessing on Jacob; once again, Jacob builds a monument and anoints it with oil; once again, he names the place Beth-El. Why is this all repeated a second time?

I will return to this question soon, but I first wish to consider the narrative's placement after the story of Dinah's rape in ch. 34. God's revelation to Jacob in Beth-El is closely linked to the story of Shechem. This is evident from the fact that, when God commands Jacob to travel to Beth-El, no one attacks Jacob on his journey because God has inflicted terror of Jacob on the cities surrounding Shechem (35:5). This implies that the episode has been deliberately placed after the story of Dinah's rape.

I have already shown that each narrative in dialogue with the revelation at Beth-El follows a certain confrontation that Jacob must face, and his successful emergence from each conflict marks a stage of his return home. Jacob firsts persuades his wives to leave their home. The second stage relates his successful parting from Laban, and the third sees his peaceful separation from Esau. This pattern can also be traced in the second revelation in Beth-El, as it transpires after a conflict between Jacob's family and the inhabitants of Canaan. Each confrontation raises a question of belonging and identity. The first conflict explores whether Jacob's wives are more strongly connected to their father or husband. The second describes Jacob's successful undermining of Laban as the head of his family, and ends with clear separation between the two entities. The encounter with Esau determines the nature of the brothers' relationship. Esau expects the two families to reunite, while Jacob shirks this connection, and even falsely claims that he will join him in Seir. The story of Dinah also addresses questions of assimilation and segregation. Hamor and Shechem wish to become one with Jacob's family. Hamor initiates a sexual bond with Dinah and wishes to realize this connection by marrying her. This union is not merely

60. I agree with the claim that 33:18–19 concludes the previous unit. See also Wenham, *Genesis*, 287.

61. Hamilton, *Genesis*, 2:349.

a marriage between one man and one woman but represents the merging of the two groups into one (34:8–9). Jacob's family objects to this union on the basis that the other party is uncircumcised and implies that the act of circumcision will elevate them to the same status as Jacob's family so that they can become one nation (34:15). Hamor and Shechem's rhetoric to their people is also based on their desire to merge with the family of Jacob (34:22–23). The story ends with the slaughter of every male in the city, which thereby prevents this union. The distinction between Jacob's family and the Canaanites is also expressed through the total eradication of foreign worship from among Jacob's family immediately following Shechem's destruction. The clear differentiation between Jacob, the rightful inheritor of the land, and the local Canaanite inhabitants, as well as the destruction of all other gods from among them, results in God's second revelation to Jacob at Beth-El.[62] This closes yet another circle: Jacob alone becomes the receptacle of God's promise when he distills his identity from those around him: from Haran, from Laban, from Esau, and from the surrounding Canaanites.

This clarifies the second revelation's juxtaposition with the story of Shechem, but the obvious duplication of the two Beth-El narratives still requires justification. One explanation is that the first revelation in Beth-El is a promise of what will be, in time, despite the bitter reality of Jacob's situation. God promises him the land, but he is forced to flee from it. God promises him the blessing of Abraham, but the journey he makes is the opposite journey to Abraham's own. Now, with Jacob's return, he reenacts all the promises, all the rites. The promise is not antithetical to his reality; it is already being fulfilled.[63]

But there is another aspect, a critical aspect, central to our argument. The first promise in Beth-El was made to Jacob when his character was portrayed in a vulnerable light, when his vow implied his belief that he had been rejected, for he was fleeing the land while Esau remained with his parents. When Isaac promises him the blessing, and even when God reveals that he has been divinely elected, this selection has no bearing on Esau's status. The fact that Jacob might be chosen does not exclude Esau from sharing his status, especially as Esau is the one who remains in Canaan. Now, however, the second revelation in Beth-El, with all its rites and rituals, takes on special significance because Jacob is alone in the land,

62. For a summary of the different opinions regarding the nature of the act of removing these foreign gods, see ibid., 375.

63. This function of the story of the revelation at Beth-El in its context in Genesis is more reasonable than any attempt to find another etiological background for the story. See, for example, Alt's opinion that the story reflects an ancient purification ritual performed before making pilgrimage from Shechem to Beth-El. See Alt, *Kleine Schriften,* 1:79–99. Westermann claims that this passage cannot be etiological because it is not a story, see Westermann, *Genesis*, 2:549.

while Esau has left Canaan for Seir. Now, for the first time, it is clear that Jacob alone is the chosen son, that he alone will continue the dynasty of Abraham and Isaac. Unlike 20 years earlier, the second revelation is not an instance of divine, psychological reassurance that the truth is antithetical to his reality. The first revelation can be interpreted as a vision of encouragement, as a promise that Jacob will return home. This is not the case with the second revelation. As the narrative progresses, so does the depiction of Jacob's growing connection with God; God's watchful presence was first clarified prior to his departure from Haran. The reason for the second revelation is not psychological; rather, it serves to clarify Jacob's exclusive status as the chosen son, as the only one who will inherit God's promise and the land. Only in retrospect do God's words in ch. 28 emerge as an exclusive promise to Jacob, not to Esau; at the time, neither Jacob nor the reader could be sure of this. Now, God's original plan comes to light. Now, the true meaning of the prophecy to Rebecca comes to light. "The elder shall serve the younger" means not merely that the younger shall have the status of firstborn, but that the younger shall be chosen, and the elder shall be rejected. All the doubts, unresolved issues, and uncertain promises of the first revelation come full circle in the second.

The fact that this revelation serves to confirm Jacob's chosen status is also supported by Jacob's change of name to Israel. Abram's name was changed as a sign of his entrance into a covenant with God; the change from Jacob to Israel also indicates his divine acceptance [64]

What is the significance of the long, arduous process until Jacob's selection is confirmed? Why is he not chosen immediately? Scholars note the similarities between the trials Abraham undergoes and the events that befall Jacob. I will not discuss them at length, but their selection processes have much in common. God commands Abraham to leave Haran and journey to the place he will show him, and God commands Jacob to leave Haran and return to Canaan. The text attempts to convey that Jacob, like Abraham, was chosen on account of his own merit. Because Jacob must leave Canaan and is theoretically able to remain in Haran, his return following divine command affirms that he is worthy of inheriting the promise of his own

64. Hamilton, *Genesis*, 2:381. Jacob's name is twice changed to Israel, once after he wrestles with the man at Peniel (22:28) and here. Scholars ascribe the first change to J and these verses to P. Hamilton claims that the repetition is logical without ascribing it to two sources, as the first time takes place before he takes leave of Esau, so there is need to give him his new name again. Hamilton, *Genesis*, 2:381. In Fishbane's opinion, the first time he received his name was before the conflict with Esau was resolved, and now that it has been resolved, he is given the name Israel once again. Fishbane, "Composition and Structure," 28. Additionally, note that there is no fundamental principle against attributing a repeated action to the same source. For example, scholars ascribe both namings of Beth-El to E, once in 28:19, and once in 35:7. Moreover, note that during the encounter between God and Jacob in the second revelation, Jacob names the place where God speaks to him, and in parallel, God gives a new name to Jacob.

accord and not solely due to his parentage—particularly in comparison to Esau, who apparently leaves the land of his own free will.

The *fifth stage* is marked by another passage referring to the first revelation at Beth-El. Following the second revelation, Jacob journeys to his father's house in Kiriath-Arba Hebron: "Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre, or Kiriath-arba, that is, Hebron, where Abraham and Isaac had resided" (35:27). This brief account realizes the final condition of Jacob's vow in Beth-El: "Then Jacob made a vow, saying, 'If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, *so that I come again to my father's house in peace*, then the Lord shall be my God'" (28:20–21). Only now is the final condition of God's promise and Jacob's vow fulfilled. Now, for the first time in more than 20 years, Jacob is reunited with his father.[65]

Jacob makes six stops on his homebound journey, aside from his origin and destination. The extent of the detail describing the journey between Haran and Hebron is not coincidental. No such landmarks are noted on his way *to* Haran; on his way back, however, he undergoes an important process at five of these locations. Jacob leaves Haran, where he informs his wives that he intends to return to Canaan. Fleeing with his family, Laban pursues him and catches up with him in the hills of Gilead (31:23). From there, Jacob continues south and meets Esau in the vicinity of the Jabbok River (32:22, 31–32; 33:1). Jacob travels to Succoth, still on the eastern side of the Jordan, where he builds a house and booths (33:17). He then arrives at Shechem, where he purchases land and pitches his tent (33:18–19). At God's command, he continues to Beth-El (35:1, 6). On the way to Bethlehem, Rachel dies in childbirth, and finally, he arrives at his father's home in Hebron (35:26). We can only speculate why this reunion is deferred; the text does not reveal why.

The description of Jacob and Isaac's reunion is laconic and utterly devoid of all emotional detail, unlike the meeting between Jacob and Esau. The lack of depicted emotion between a father and son who have not seen each for 20 years is puzzling, but undoubtedly intentional. I believe that the text omits the personal and emotional aspect of this reunion in order to generate focus on Jacob's status as the chosen son; the narrator therefore emphasizes that Jacob returns to Hebron, "where Abraham and Isaac

65. There is no mention of any reunion between Jacob and Rebecca; strangely enough, she is the only matriarch whose death is not mentioned in the text. It seems that she dies during Jacob's time in Haran, and never saw her son again, which may be a fulfillment of her words in 27:13. Rendsburg explains that the mention of Rebecca's nurse Deborah in 35:8 emphasizes this. G. Rendsburg, *The Redaction of Genesis* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1986), 364–66. This is actually first mentioned in a midrash. The Psikta de Rav Kahana (Mandelbaum edition) 3: R. Yosi said in the name of R. Hanina: "Her death was not publicized, nor even mentioned in the text, but only alluded to, as it is written: 'And Deborah, Rebecca's nurse, died' (Gen 35:8), 'so it was called the Oak of Weeping,'" and Naḥmanides provides the same explanation.

had resided." The story does not fulfill the reader's literary expectations because it focuses on the theological significance of the event. Jacob's return to Hebron is not described from an emotional, personal perspective; it is designed to convey that Jacob is joining the ranks of his forefathers. This closes the final circle that opened 20 years earlier in Beth-El: Jacob returns to his father's household.

Each of the five stages that mark Jacob's gradual return home is preceded by potential disaster or actual tragedy, and the arrival at his father's home is no exception. Jacob is reunited with his father after the death of his beloved wife Rachel. This tragedy is followed by a painful conflict with his eldest son, Reuben, who lies with Jacob's concubine Bilhah. The narrative juxtaposes three family affairs: first, Rachel dies in childbirth; then, Reuben sins; finally, Jacob is reunited with his father. Before reunion with his father, Jacob is subjected to great suffering within his own nuclear family. Each stage of closure brings Jacob closer to his destiny as chosen son, but only after difficult trial.

The central theme of this narrative is Jacob's return home as chosen son, heir of Abraham and Isaac. This structure conveys the complex, convoluted path Jacob must travel before he reaches this position. Unlike the opinion of many commentators who believe that his status was determined before birth, he has numerous hurdles to overcome before he can take his rightful place as his father's successor. Even those who ascribe more importance to the moment of Jacob's selection are convinced that Isaac already reaches this decision at the beginning of ch. 28, when he blesses him with the blessing of Abraham, and that this decision is confirmed by God at Beth-El. I have shown that Isaac's blessing in ch. 28 does not necessarily mean that Jacob is the only chosen son, and even God's promise of seed and land at Beth-El does not settle the matter. In any event, the issue whether Esau is rejected is irrelevant at this point, for the focus is on Jacob's status. The text clearly presents Jacob as a character clearly plagued by doubt, uncertain of whether he will ever return following what he perceives as banishment. Focalizing through Jacob, the reader too cannot be certain that Jacob will ever return to Canaan and experience the blessing's fulfillment as the chosen son. Initially, the narrative does not provide a clear answer to this question, and Jacob's return to the land and his election as the exclusive heir of his forefathers is described gradually, as a long, winding road of pitfalls and setbacks. Jacob's extrication from Haran is not easy. Wary of their reaction to God's command, his rhetoric to his wives is carefully, painstakingly constructed. Jacob is pursued by Laban, and only divine intervention saves him from violence. After his encounter with Laban, which ends with the establishment of boundaries between them, Jacob sets out to meet Esau with great trepidation. His fears go unrealized, however, and no harm befalls him. Jacob then arrives in Shechem, where his daughter is raped and captured. Following his sons' destruction of the city, he is summoned to Beth-El, where he reenacts the rituals of the first revelation. After

Rachel's death and Reuben's sexual betrayal, Jacob finally arrives in Hebron. Each of these stages is textually and thematically linked to the story of Jacob's departure to Haran, and each sees the closure of another aspect of the promise and vow made at Beth-El. We have seen that Jacob's abrupt departure plunges him into doubt about his return to his birthplace and father's house, and his journey back to Canaan is indeed beset with perils, obstacles, and trials. Jacob must navigate these choppy waters in order to return home as the chosen son and heir of Abraham and Isaac's legacy.

The Process of Esau's Rejection

In parallel to Jacob's uphill struggle to rank of chosen son, the text presents the process of Esau's repudiation. After Isaac sends Jacob to find a wife in Haran, Esau, having already married two Hittite women who displease his parents, weds Mahalath, daughter of Ishmael: "So when Esau saw that the Canaanite women did not please his father Isaac, Esau went to Ishmael and took Mahalath daughter of Abraham's son Ishmael, and sister of Nebaioth, to be his wife in addition to the wives he had" (28:8–9). It is clear from the sequence of events that Esau takes this step in an attempt to regain his father's approval. From his character's perspective, if Jacob's journey to Haran to find a worthy wife earns him the right to succeed his father, then marriage with Ishmael's daughter might achieve the same end. This is also implied in the narrator's presentation of Mahalath's genealogy, which mentions that Ishmael is the son of Abraham; Esau's act of marriage ostensibly renders him worthy of continuing Abraham's legacy.

After Jacob returns from Haran, we learn that Esau has meanwhile settled in Mount Seir:

> Jacob sent messengers before him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom. (32:4)
>
> Let my lord pass on ahead of his servant, and I will lead on slowly, according to the pace of the cattle that are before me and according to the pace of the children, until I come to my lord in Seir. . . . So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir. (33:14, 16)

At some point during Jacob's sojourn in Haran, Esau made his way to Edom. In ch. 32, there is no given reason for this move; nonetheless, its implications are tremendous. First of all, the reader was under the impression that, while Jacob must flee to Haran, Esau remained in Canaan with his parents. This impression aggravated Jacob's sense that he was being rejected while Esau's connection with his parents and homeland would grow stronger in his absence. Now, the reader learns that Esau too had left Canaan during this time, so that he had no real advantage over Jacob during his long hiatus. I believe that Esau's move to Edom contributes to understanding of Jacob's exclusive selection by God. At the end of ch. 33, after a brief delay, Jacob enters Canaan. Shortly after, in ch. 35, using the same

formula as Abraham's blessing, God promises Jacob that he will inherit his grandfather. As I explain above, on his return to Canaan Jacob is the exclusive heir of this blessing, and this is supported by the fact that Esau is not in Canaan when Jacob receives the blessing. During the second revelation at Beth-El, Esau is in Edom, far removed from the significant events unfolding in the promised land. Whether Esau himself gave up the legacy willingly will emerge later. Meanwhile, Esau makes a reappearance after his father's death: "And Isaac breathed his last; he died and was gathered to his people, old and full of days; and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him" (35:29).

Esau has suddenly reappeared in Canaan. He and Jacob bury Isaac together, and the text emphasizes that they are both his sons.[66] It is interesting to note that Esau's name precedes Jacob's, in contrast to Abraham's burial, where Isaac is mentioned before Ishmael (25:9). If Isaac's mention before firstborn Ishmael can be ascribed to his chosen status, then why is Jacob not listed before Esau? This may reflect that Esau does not perceive himself as a rejected son. This is supported by the contrast of Abraham's dismissal of all his sons but Isaac before his death (25:6) and Isaac's lack of overt selection in the narrative. Isaac never explicitly rejects Esau, so that both sons bury their father in equal standing. This verse supports my claim that Isaac never casts off either of his sons, and that his blessing in ch. 27 is merely a blessing to his firstborn.

Esau's separation from Jacob takes place in the next chapter, which addresses whether Esau freely forfeits his status in Isaac's family and the privilege of succeeding his father.[67] Even though Esau spends a certain amount of time outside of Canaan, he is nevertheless present during Isaac's burial, and both he and Jacob are described as Isaac's sons. Chapter 36 solves this problem, repeating time after time that Esau is Edom, that he lives in Edom, that his descendants live in Edom. This repetition—in 36:1, 8, 17, 19, 21, 31, and 43—is designed to generate an inextricable connection between Esau and Edom. Chapter 36 marks the end of the struggle between the brothers and concludes with Esau's settlement of the land of Edom. The chapter opens with the statement "These are the descendants of Esau, that is, Edom" (36:1) and concludes, "these are the clans of Edom, that is,

66. Wenham, *Genesis*, 328. Scholars explain that, according to this verse, which is ascribed to P, Esau lives with his father in Hebron, on good terms with Jacob. See, for example, Skinner, *Genesis*, 428. However, this source does not mention where Esau lives. Their genial relationship need not be explained as the result of two different sources, but it more logically refers to one continual narrative, with their relationship developing over time—which is true of real life relationships. The scholars in question are unable to ascribe such complexity to biblical characters—they are only able to suggest that different passages come from different sources!

67. Regarding the objective of ch. 36, from the perspective not only of its historical value but also of its narrative function, see Westermann, *Genesis*, 2:568; Anderson, *Brotherhood and Inheritance,* 144–48.

Esau, the father of Edom" (36:43).[68] The length and detail of Esau's genealogy, compared with other rejected sons in Genesis, is designed to establish a strong affinity between Esau and Edom, thus concluding the story of the rivalry between the twins.

Esau's evolution into Edom, according to this chapter, is the result of Esau's decision to move to the land of Edom because of his brother Jacob:

> Then Esau took his wives, his sons, his daughters, and all the members of his household, his cattle, all his livestock, and all the property he had acquired in the land of Canaan; and he moved to a land some distance from his brother Jacob. For their possessions were too great for them to live together; the land where they were staying could not support them because of their livestock. So Esau settled in the hill country of Seir; Esau is Edom. (36:6–8)

According to this narrative, the character Esau chooses to forfeit his connection to the land of Canaan, the land of his forefathers. Esau leaves, while Jacob stays. Moreover, this chapter defines the land of Edom as the land of Esau's possession, of his holding: "these are the clans of Edom (that is, Esau, the father of Edom), according to their settlements in the land that they held" (36:43). The word *held* is no coincidence; it is also used to define Abraham's relation to the land of Canaan in Gen 17:8; and in Jacob's address to Joseph when he quotes God's words to him in 48:4. If so, then the text wishes to differentiate between Esau's inheritance—Edom—and the land inherited by the forefathers—Canaan. The curious list of Edom's kings in this chapter also becomes significant in light of the divine promise to Abraham and Isaac: "kings shall come from you" (17:6; 35:11). Edom has its own royal line, emphasizes the Bible; Esau has his own kings, Edomite kings, who ruled before there were kings in Israel. The two dynasties are separate and distinct.[69]

We can now understand why Esau is said to have left Edom in ch. 36 because of Jacob, while he apparently already dwells there in ch. 32, before Jacob returns to Canaan.[70] Although the biblical text does not provide enough information for a complete picture, these narrative gaps allow for the presentation of different angles of the story while the main message is retained.[71] The narrative seems intent on presenting ch. 35 as the climax

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68. Scholars claim that this key sentence is a later addition, for example, R. R. Wilson, *Genealogy and History in the Biblical World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), 169; Gunkel, *Genesis*, 376; Westermann, *Genesis*, 2:562. But this is the heart of the chapter, as arises from different points in the analysis of the chapter.

69. Regarding the royal dynasty, see J. R. Bartlett, "The Edomite King-List of Genesis XXXVI 31–39 and 1 Chron 1 43–50," *JTS* n.s. 16 (1965): 301–14.

70. This contradiction was explained as the result of two sources; 36:6 is ascribed to P, while the story in ch. 32 belongs to JE. See, for example, Skinner, *Genesis*, 405.

71. See Heard's claim that there is no need to understand precisely how the two different narratives relating to Esau's living in Seir fit in with each other. In either case, he

of the struggle between the brothers—the blessing is bestowed on Jacob while he is in the land and Esau is not. At the same time, a different, more personal angle of the story comes to light: Jacob alone remains in Canaan because Esau left for his brother's sake. The disparity between the two narratives can be bridged in various ways, but this lack of information in the biblical narrative has no effect on the message it wishes to convey to its readers. Regardless of when he leaves Canaan, Esau leaves out of choice, for his own interests. He willingly forfeited his birthright to Jacob to gain a mess of pottage in 25:33; now he willingly leaves Jacob in the land of their forefathers to gain room for his livestock.

The explanation that the verses of ch. 36 are designed to associate Esau with Edom also clarifies another problem in this chapter. The apparent repetition of the similar opening formulas in vv. 1 and 9, "these are the descendants of Esau,"[72] can also be attributed to the narrative intention of linking Esau to Edom. The first genealogical list, in vv. 1–5, records the names of Esau's wives and children when he is still in Canaan. After Esau leaves Canaan for Edom, "So Esau settled in the hill country of Seir; Esau is Edom" (v. 8), the dynasty is listed anew; it includes the names of the sons born in Canaan as well as those born in Edom. This repetition serves to establish Esau's settlement in his family's new territory. This is emphasized in the difference between the two opening formulas: "These are the descendants of Esau, that is, Edom" (v. 1). These are the descendants of Esau, ancestor of the Edomites, in the hill country of Seir (v. 9).

From v. 9 and on, Esau's descendants live in "the hill country of Seir." In contrast with the repeated emphasis that Esau and his descendants live in Edom, the narrative about Jacob's descendants states only once that "Jacob settled in the land where his father had lived, the land of Canaan" (37:1). This verse stands in particular contrast to 36:8: "So Esau settled in the hill country of Seir; Esau is Edom."[73] These verses emphasize that Esau dwells in Edom, while Jacob lives in Canaan, in the land of his forefathers. Jacob, not Esau, is Isaac's successor.[74] This marks the conclusion of the struggle between the brothers.

Thus, Jacob and Esau's story ends: Esau and his descendants inhabit the land of Edom, while Jacob and his descendants tread the same ground as their ancestors Abraham and Isaac. The blessing of seed and land promised to Abraham passed down to Isaac and eventually, after many trials and

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leaves Canaan freely. C. R. Heard, *Dynamics of Diselection: Ambiguity in Genesis 12–36* and Ethnic Boundaries in Post-exilic Judah, SBL Semeia Studies 39 (Atlanta: SBL, 2001), 178.

72. The repetition of another introduction in v. 9 is considered an indication of two different sources. Wilson claims that vv. 1–8 belong to one source, and vv. 9–43 were added by the redactor. Wilson, *Genealogy and History,* 175. Concerning vv. 9–43 as a later addition, see also Wenham, *Genesis*, 336.

73. See ibid., 334. The similarity between these verses led most scholars to conclude that 37:1 originally appeared immediately after 36:8.

74. See also Steinmetz, *From Father to Son,* 93.

tribulations, to Jacob. At this point, the rivalry between the twins seems to have been peacefully resolved. God chooses Jacob as the sole successor, and Esau leaves the land of his own free will, forfeiting his right to be a chosen son. Esau's first action in the narrative is to forfeit his birthright; his final act is to forfeit his right to the land.

Summary and Conclusions Regarding Jacob's Selection and Esau's Rejection

The story of Jacob and Esau is essentially the story of a fraternal struggle over their status as the forefathers of nations. The scope of this struggle is unique, beginning *before* the twins' birth in Gen 25:19 and only concluding together with Jacob's narrative, with Esau's genealogical line in Gen 36. The central theme throughout this long, winding narrative is the process of Jacob's election and Esau's rejection. The conflict between the twin brothers begins in their mother's womb and is symbolized by Jacob's grasping Esau's heel during their birth. It continues with Jacob's persuading Esau to sell him the birthright in return for a mess of pottage and reaches a climax when Rebecca and Jacob deceive Isaac and steal the blessing Isaac intended for Esau. This conflict involves the entire family. The narrative neither incriminates Jacob for his acts nor justifies them; similarly, Esau is not presented as an explicitly negative character. Neither Isaac's reasons for blessing Esau nor Rebecca's motives for preventing this blessing are entirely clear. Above all, God's initial, ambiguous prophecy and subsequent lack of intervention is far removed from the clear instructions to Abraham a generation earlier, which unequivocally expressed that Isaac, and not Ishmael, was to succeed him. Clearly, the story of Jacob and Esau focuses on the struggle between the brothers and not on the outcome of this struggle.

I have proposed that in Genesis, Isaac is not characterized as a father with any intention of selecting one of his sons and rejecting the other, nor has he any reason to contemplate this option in the first place. Rather, his portrayal in the text suggests that he assumes both sons will continue in his path. The blessing intended for Esau is the blessing of the firstborn, which Esau earns by default, by merit of birth order. I also raised the possibility that Rebecca, like her husband, does not believe that either son will be excluded; rather, her actions are an attempt to give her beloved Jacob the upper hand. I have shown that even God's oracle, "the elder shall serve the younger" (25:23), can be interpreted similarly. It is widely agreed that Isaac's benediction to Jacob before his departure to Haran reflects that at this point, he is already the chosen son, but I also challenged this opinion. Alternately, I argue that Jacob is blessed at this point in order to strengthen his ties with the land before his departure; in order to reassure him that this embarkation is not a sign of rejection. This blessing, however, does not rule out the possibility that both sons are chosen, because at this point, Esau remains in Canaan. Even God's promise to Jacob at Beth-El does not

negate the possibility that Esau, too, is Isaac's heir. Genesis 28:10–22 relate that Jacob makes a vow in addition to the promise that he has just received, a vow that can be read as a reflection of his doubt regarding his status. His departure, coupled with the fact that his brother—his father's favorite—remains behind, leads him to question his position. He wonders why he must journey to Haran to find a wife when a servant was sent to Haran on his father's behalf for the same purpose—especially given that his father's rejected half-brothers were the ones who were sent away. His lonely, empty-handed journey only exacerbates these suspicions. For this reason, God's words in Beth-El serve as important beacons for the journey home. These words, however, reveal nothing about Esau's status. Having just been sent away from his home, Jacob is only concerned about his own future.

Jacob's selection process is significantly longer and more complex than commonly believed in scholarship. The lion's share of the seven chapters following the revelation at Beth-El is devoted to the story of Jacob's departure from Haran and the stages that mark his return to his land and his father's home. Five different passages are in dialogue with the story of his departure from Canaan, illustrating the different stages of Jacob's return to his God, his land, and his father's household. More than a mere memoir, these chapters document how Jacob's life is a series of hurdles he must overcome to secure his legacy. Jacob's exclusive position is only confirmed through the second revelation at Beth-El, when he receives Abraham's blessing of land and seed and his name is changed from Jacob to Israel. At this point, Esau is no longer in Canaan, so that the blessing is channeled to Jacob alone. God's selection of Jacob and exclusion of Esau is given practical corroboration when Esau leaves Canaan and settles Edom (ch. 36). Esau's distinct genealogy and royal dynasty, the repeated identification of Esau with Edom, and the assertion of Edom as the land of Esau's holding, establish Jacob and Esau as two separate nations. The text reports that Esau "settled in Edom." In contrast, the beginning of ch. 37 relates that "Jacob settled in the land where his father had lived, the land of Canaan."

This, however, leads us to the crucial question: *why* was Jacob chosen, and *why* was Esau rejected? The narrative provides no clear answer. Some ascribe Esau's rejection to behavioral flaws, such as his bestial appetite or his forfeiting of the birthright.[75] In my opinion, these elements should not be given too much weight.[76] One of the more significant issues is Esau's marriage with Canaanite women.[77] But this too does not necessarily disqualify him from being part of the chosen nation. Abraham also marries Qetura, a woman of unknown origin. Jacob's sons wed Canaanites, and this does not eliminate them from the family heritage. Esau's murderous

75. See Speiser, *Genesis*, 196; Gunkel, *Genesis*, 291; Westermann, *Genesis*, 417.
76. See also Spina, "The Face of God," 6–7.
77. Sarna, *Genesis*, 189; Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 205.

intentions toward Jacob are certainly problematic, but they are never realized, while Joseph's brothers have similar intentions that actually lead to Joseph's enslavement.

And why is Jacob the chosen son? His behavior is not presented in a more positive light than Esau's; perhaps the opposite. This is especially true when the brothers reunite: Jacob greatly fears their meeting, but Esau showers him with affection.[78] There is no clear explanation for their different destinies, and I do not believe that there is any other way of viewing the matter. Jacob's path is clearly related to Abraham's—and the reason for Abraham's election is not explicit either. The book of Genesis provides no clear explanation for God's election of Jacob and rejection of Esau. This indeterminate conclusion, this ambivalence, was to play a decisive role in how the ancients read the story, as we will see below.

78. Spina, "The Face of God," 3–25. It is notable that he exaggerates how positive Esau's description is. For example, he emphasizes Esau's positive fate according to ch. 36, but he does not observe that the text emphasizes how he has been rejected.

Chapter 3

Israel and Edom in the Preexilic Biblical Literature

Historiography

One might assume that Edom and Judah's shaky relationship in the monarchic period contributed significantly toward the strong hostility toward Edom. Yet a survey of their preexilic relationship, as reflected in biblical sources, proves that the deep antipathy toward Edom is not rooted in this period. Indeed, Liver and Myers are convinced that the preexilic relationship between the two nations was nothing unusual compared to Israel's ties with other neighboring nations. Conflict usually stemmed from territorial or economic issues. Above all, it is worth noting that Edom was usually subject to Judah, not the opposite.[1] I will now survey the relevant sources.[2]

No such hostility features in the books of Joshua and Judges. In the book of Joshua Edom is not mentioned at all, except as one of the borders of the land of Judah (Josh 15:1, 21). In the book of Judges, Edom is mentioned in the song of Deborah (5:4), but not at all in a negative sense.[3] Edom also features in Jephthah's speech in Judg 11:17–18, but only as part of a recapitulation of historical events related to Israel's war against Ammon. This verse recounts the familiar narrative of Num 14:14–21 and Deut 2:2–8, in which the king of Edom refuses Israel passage through his land.

Edom's absence in the book of Judges is significant because this book is entirely concerned with neighboring nations' attacks on Israel before the establishment of the monarchy. Almost all of Israel's neighbors are their aggressors: Aram, Moab, Canaan, Midian, Amalek, Bnei Kedem, Ammon, Philistia, Sidon, Maon. With so many conflicts noted between Israel and

1. J. M. Myers, "Edom and Judah in the Sixth–Fifth Centuries BC," in *Near Eastern Studies in Honor of William Foxwell Albright*, ed. H. Goedicke (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971), 377–92; J. Liver, "The Wars of Israel and Edom," in *The Military History of the Land of Israel in Biblical Times,* ed. J. Liver (Tel Aviv: Maarachot, 1964), 190–205 [Hebrew].

2. Some sources present great difficulty because it is unclear whether the text refers to "ארם," Aram, or "אדם," Edom. The letters ד and ר are very similar and often cause confusion; sometimes the *qere* and *ketiv* versions differ. The letters are also similar in ancient Hebrew. See C. Levin, "Aram und/oder Edom in den Büchern Samuel und Könige," *Textus* 24 (2009): 65–84.

3. Some propose reading "Edom" instead of "Aram" in the story of Othniel the son of Kenaz, Judg 3:8, so that the southern leader fights in the south rather than the distant north. But there is no basis for this proposal. See also Bartlett, *Edom and the Edomites*, 94.

their neighbors, Edom's inculpability indicates that at the beginning of Israel's history, ties with Edom were relatively peaceful. This positive relationship may well have been related to Israel's early notion of brotherhood between the two nations, as expressed in the law in Deut 23:8: "You shall not abhor any of the Edomites, for they are your kin."

The first conflict with Edom after Israel's settlement of the land features in a list of Saul's wars against Israel's neighbors:

> When Saul had taken the kingship over Israel, he fought against all his enemies on every side—against Moab, against the Ammonites, against Edom, against the kings of Zobah, and against the Philistines; wherever he turned he routed them. He did valiantly, and struck down the Amalekites, and rescued Israel out of the hands of those who plundered them. (1 Sam 14:47–48)

Throughout Saul's career, his chief adversary is clearly the Philistines, while the war against Edom occupies a relatively minor place. Liver claims that this war was a defensive battle in order to prevent Edomite expansion into Israel's territory.[4] Bartlett mentions that Saul did not actually conquer Edom;[5] moreover, it is worth noting that the Septuagint replaces the word *Edom* with *Aram* in this verse.

David's time sees a new policy of territorial expansion, and Edom is mentioned as one of his conquests:[6]

> David won a name for himself. When he returned, he killed 18,000 Edomites in the Valley of Salt. He put garrisons in Edom; throughout all Edom he put garrisons, and all the Edomites became David's servants. And the Lord gave victory to David wherever he went. (2 Sam 8:13–14)

Even within the context of David's wars, it is evident that his military efforts against Philistia, Aram, Moab, Ammon, and Amalek were more significant and more extensive than his battle against Edom. Edom is the last nation mentioned in this chapter, and Bartlett claims that this was because Edom posed little threat to his kingdom.[7] In the parallel account in 2 Chr 18:12, Abishai the son of Zeruiah led this battle:

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4. Liver, "The Wars of Israel and Edom," 195.

5. Bartlett, *Edom and the Edomites*, 104.

6. The version in 2 Sam 8:13 reads "Aram." This is not likely because the war takes place in the vicinity of the Dead Sea, and the name should read "Edom," replacing the ר with a ד. The parallel account in 1 Chr 18:12–13 indeed reads "Edom": "Abishai son of Zeruiah killed 18,000 Edomites in the Valley of Salt. He put garrisons in Edom; and all the Edomites became subject to David. And the Lord gave victory to David wherever he went." The version of this episode as reflected in Ps 60 also reads "Edom": "A *Miktam* of David; for instruction; when he struggled with Aram-naharaim and with Aram-zobah, and when Joab on his return killed 12,000 Edomites in the Valley of Salt." See Radak's conciliation between the two versions.

7. Bartlett, *Edom and the Edomites,* 104. It seems that he wished to secure the southeastern border of his kingdom and perhaps even control the route going north from the sea near Elath; see ibid., 105.

> Abishai son of Zeruiah killed 18,000 Edomites in the Valley of Salt. He put garrisons in Edom; and all the Edomites became subject to David. And the LORD gave victory to David wherever he went.

There is no contradiction between these sources: David is the king and all victories are considered his, as mentioned in Samuel, but according to Chronicles, the actual battle was fought by Abishai. Another battle in David's time is led by Joab the son of Zeruaih in 1 Kgs 11, 15–16:

> For when David was in Edom, and Joab the commander of the army went up to bury the dead, he killed every male in Edom (for Joab and all Israel remained there six months, until he had eliminated every male in Edom).

These sources imply that in David's time, Edom was under Judean rule, meaning they paid him taxes. The extent of Judah's dominion over Edom is given to scholarly dispute.[8]

In Solomon's time, Israel's grip weakened when a powerful ruler who fled during David's time returned to Edom, 1 Kgs 11:14–25:

> Then the LORD raised up an adversary against Solomon, Haddad the Edomite; he was of the royal house in Edom. . . . Haddad fled to Egypt with some Edomites who were servants of his father. He was a young boy at that time. . . . When Haddad heard in Egypt that David slept with his ancestors and that Joab the commander of the army was dead, Haddad said to Pharaoh, "Let me depart, that I may go to my own country."

From this source, Noth understands that Edom broke completely free from Solomon's yoke, and he even contends that this occurred at the beginning of Solomon's reign.[9] Bright and Bartlett hold that King Haddad caused certain trouble for Solomon, but he did not manage to restore Edom's independence.[10]

Edom is not mentioned during the reigns of Rehoboam or Asa but during Jehoshaphat's reign, Edom's subservience to Judah is explicitly noted: "There was no king in Edom; a deputy was king" (1 Kgs 22:48).[11]

According to Liver, Edom cast off Judah's yoke following Shishak's campaign in the fifth year of Rehoboam's rule (1 Kgs 14:25–28), so the

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8. J. M. Miller and J. H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (London: SCM, 1986), 182; Bartlett, *Edom and the Edomites,* 107.

9. Noth, *A History*, 205–6.

10. J. Bright, *A History of Israel* (OTL; London: SCM, 1960), 214; Bartlett, *Edom and the Edomites*, 110–13. This is also the opinion of A. R. Schulman, "The Curious Case of Hadad the Edomite," in *Egyptological Studies in Honor of R. A. Parker*, ed. L. H. Lasko (Hanover: University Press of New England; London: Brown University Press, 1986), 122–35. In his opinion, Hadad did not manage to gain control over Edom, so he moved to Aram, and from there he attempted an attack on Solomon. He eventually ruled over Aram and not Edom. This explanation seems somewhat contrived; the two "snares" God sets up for Solomon seem to be Hadad of Edom and Razon the son of Elyadah from Aram.

11. 2 Chr 20 describes the war of Moab and Ammon against Jehoshaphat. Verse 2 relates that Aram joins in. Gordis claims that this actually means Edom, as implied in the reference to Mount Seir in vv. 22–23. See Gordis, "Edom, Israel and Amos," 114 and n.16.

statement about Edom's lack of king in Jehoshaphat's time therefore marks the restoration of Judean rule over Edom.[12]

In Jehoram's time, Edom reclaimed their independence: "In his days Edom revolted against the rule of Judah, and set up a king of their own" (2 Kgs 8:20). David's conquest of Edom therefore endured until Jehoram's reign, and he presumably ruled via governor (1 Kgs 22:48).[13] In Jehoshaphat's time, Edom was under his jurisdiction, which explains why he goes out to war with the "king" of Edom and Jehoram of Israel against the king of Moab (2 Kgs 3:4–27). Even though the ruler of Edom is referred to as a king, this does not contradict the verse in 1 Kgs 22:48 or 2 Kgs 8:20, which describes the lack of an *independent* king. The king referred to in 2 Kgs 3 is probably Jehoshaphat's subject.[14]

Jehoram attempted to regain control after Edom's rebellion, but to no avail. His reign therefore marked a period of Edomite independence:

> In his days Edom revolted against the rule of Judah, and set up a king of their own. Then Joram crossed over to Zair with all his chariots. He set out by night and attacked the Edomites and their chariot commanders who had surrounded him; but his army fled home. So Edom has been in revolt against the rule of Judah to this day. Libnah also revolted at the same time. (2 Kgs 8:20–22)

Sixty years later, during Jehoram's grandson Amaziah's reign, Judah regained its footing and reconquered Edom. Liver claims that not all of Edom succumbed to Judah's yoke:[15]

> He killed 10,000 Edomites in the Valley of Salt and took Sela by storm; he called it Jokthe-el, which is its name to this day (2 Kgs 14:7).

The conquest of Edom brought great glory to Amaziah, as implied by Jehoash's reply to him in 2 Kgs 14:10. This war is described in great detail in 2 Chr 25:5–16 and relates that Amaziah hired 100,000 soldiers from the kingdom of Israel. Following instructions of "a man of God," he does not send them into battle but rather discharges them, which causes great

12. Liver, "The Wars of Israel and Edom," 198.

13. According to Noth's aforementioned opinion that Edom threw off Solomon's yoke, their breaking free again in Jehoram's time was because Jehoshaphat managed to regain control of Edom, although it is not mentioned in the text. This is also claimed by Liver, "The Wars of Israel and Edom," 198–99. In an inscription of Adad-Nirari III, Edom is mentioned as one of Assyria's tribute-payers (*ANET*, 281).

14. This is also the opinion of M. Haran, "Observations on the Historical Background of Amos 1:2–2:6," *IEJ* 18 (1968): 201–12 and n. 19. In Gordis's opinion, Judah's dominion over Edom seems to have been formal rather than substantive. Gordis, "Edom, Israel and Amos," 113. For a discussion of this problem and various solutions, see Bartlett, *Edom and the Edomites*, 118–21.

15. Liver, "The Wars of Israel and Edom," 202; Bartlett claims that Amaziah did not manage to conquer Edom but did inflict great damage. See Bartlett, *Edom and the Edomites*, 123–24.

Israelite resentment toward Judah. The war itself is also described in detail; vv. 11–12 recount that Amaziah smote 10,000 warriors of Seir, and took another 10,000 captive, whom he later killed.

Uziah, Amaziah's son, retained control: "He rebuilt Elath and restored it to Judah" (2 Kgs 14:22). Two generations later, Ahaz, Uziah's grandson, lost this jurisdiction: "At that time the king of Edom recovered Elath for Edom, and drove the Judeans from Elath; and the Edomites came to Elath, where they live to this day" (2 Kgs 16:6).

2 Chronicles 28:17–18 relates the Edomite-Philistine infiltration of Judah in Ahaz's time in greater detail:

> For the Edomites had again invaded and defeated Judah, and carried away captives. And the Philistines had made raids on the cities in the Shephelah and the Negeb of Judah, and had taken Beth-shemesh, Aijalon, Gederoth, Soco with its villages, Timnah with its villages, and Gimzo with its villages; and they settled there.

Psalms

Other sources in Psalms, Amos, Isaiah, and Jeremiah reflect Edom and Israel's strained relationship during the monarchic period preceding the destruction of the temple. One such example can be found in Ps 60 (and some verses in Ps 60 are identical to some verses in Ps 108):

> 1. To the leader: according to the Lily of the Covenant. A Miktam of David; for instruction;
> 2. When he struggled with Aram-naharaim and with Aram-zobah, and when Joab on his return killed twelve thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt. . . .
> 8. God has promised in His sanctuary: "With exultation I will divide up Shechem, and portion out the Vale of Succoth.
> 9. Gilead is Mine, and Manasseh is Mine; Ephraim is My helmet; Judah is My scepter.
> 10. Moab is My washbasin; on Edom I hurl my shoe; over Philistia I shout in triumph."
> 11. Who will bring me to the fortified city? Who will lead me to Edom?

Psalm 83 also lists Edom among the enemy nations:

> 7. The tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites, Moab and the Hagrites,
> 8. Gebal and Ammon and Amalek, Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre;
> 9. Assyria also has joined them; they are the strong arm of the children of Lot. *Selah!*
> 10. Do to them as You did to Midian, as to Sisera and Jabin at the Wadi Kishon,
> 11. who were destroyed at En-dor, who became dung for the ground.
> 12. Make their nobles like Oreb and Zeeb, all their princes like Zebah and Zalmunna,
> 13. who said, "Let us take the pastures of God for our own possession."

Scholars are divided regarding the time of these psalms' composition.[16] The opinion that they date back to the time of David is reasonable.[17] These psalms are verses of supplication, inspired by the wars between Israel and its neighbors, Edom among them. Edom is not singled out in either of them; it features together with other enemy nations. Psalm 60 also mentions Moab and Philistia (v. 10). Psalm 83 includes Edom, the Ishmaelites, Moab, the Hagrites, Gebal, Ammon, Amalek, Philistia, and Tyre. In these sources, there is nothing unique about Israel's relationship with Edom; they are merely one enemy among many.

Amos 1:11–12

Similarly, Amos's brief statement about Edom in 1:11–12 does not deviate from the pattern that characterizes the series of prophecies in this chapter:

> Thus says the LORD:
> For three transgressions of Edom, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment;
> because he pursued his brother with the sword and cast off all pity;
> he maintained his anger perpetually, and kept his wrath forever.
> So I will send a fire on Teman, and it shall devour the strongholds of Bozrah.

The reference to Edom's pursuit is unclear. Kaufmann ascribes these verses to events of Jehoram's time, when Edom managed to break free of Judah's yoke (2 Kgs 8:20),[18] while Hoffman argues that this occurred during the reign of Jehoshaphat.[19] Either way, Amos speaks of an event that took place before his own time.[20] This is a reasonable claim, as Edom was controlled

16. Some claim that Ps 60 is based on Jehoiakim's time, while others ascribe it to the destruction. See F. L. Hossfeld and E. Zenger, *Psalms 2*, trans. M. Maloney, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 95–96.

17. For the opinion that Ps 60 is (partially) ascribed to David's time, see E. G. Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 2 vols., ICC(Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1907), 2:57; A. Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary*, trans. H. Hartwell, OTL (London: SCM, 1962), 438–39. For the dating of Ps 83, vv. 7–8, in particular, see Hossfeld and Zenger, *Psalms* 2, 340. Liver claims that Ps 83 reflects the period before the establishment of the monarchy. See Liver, "The Wars of Israel and Edom," 195.

18. Y. Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel*, vol. 6 (Jerusalem: Bialik, 1964), 62 [Hebrew].

19. Y. Hoffman, *The Prophecies against Foreign Nations in the Bible* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 1977), 168 [Hebrew]. It is related that Jehoshaphat's ships broke at Ezion-Gever; Hoffman surmises that the Edomites exploited this to harm Jehoshaphat's men.

20. Because Edom was under Judean rule in Amos's time, many scholars assume that the prophecy is postexilic, relating to Edom's participation in the destruction. See H. W. Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, trans. W. Janzen, S. D. McBride, and C. A. Muenchow, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 160; J. Barton, *Amos's Oracles against the Nations: A Study of Amos* 1.3–2.5 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 32. For a survey of opinions in this direction, see Gordis, "Edom, Israel and Amos," 117 n. 29. For opposing opinions, see ibid., 118–23. Bartlett is also convinced that it dates to a time after the destruction,

by Judah in Amos' day. Paul accepts Haran's suggestion that Uziah did not manage to conquer Edom in its entirety, but only Elath. The conflict with Edom, therefore, might be referring to Jeroboam the son of Jehoash's reign, when Amos prophesied.[21]

At first glance, the attitude toward Edom seems anything but unique, considering that this prophecy is part of a series of seven identically patterned prophecies about different enemy nations.

Nonetheless, Edom still receives more attention than other nations in this chapter; I have noted this biblical phenomenon above. Edom does not only feature in its own prophecy; in two other places, Edom is criticized by the prophet. Amos rebukes Gaza for betraying and exiling entire communities to Edom: "Thus says the Lord: For three transgressions of Gaza, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they carried into exile entire communities, to hand them over to Edom" (1:6). He makes similar accusations against Tyre: "Thus says the Lord: for three transgressions of Tyre, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because they delivered entire communities over to Edom, and did not remember the covenant of kinship" (1:9). Edom is condemned in three consecutive prophecies. The historical ground for these accusations is unclear, as Edom was too small and too weak to have purchased Judean slaves from Philistia and Phoenicia.[22] We do not know much about the extent and scope of the slave trade in Edom; the Edomites probably did need manpower to work in the lead mines in their territory, although the number of slaves was presumably small.[23] Moreover, there is much missing information about Edomite-Judean ties.[24] It is also worth noting that the exiled communities referred to were not necessarily Judeans; they are not specified by name. While the prophet accuses some nations of crimes against Judah, such as

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but he argues that there is no reason not to think that the prophecy is originally from the middle of the monarchic era. See Bartlett, *Edom and the Edomites*, 100. Another possibility is that Amaziah and Uziah did not actually rule over Edom even though they defeated them in several battles. See S. Cohen, "The Political Background of the Words of Amos," *HUCA* 36 (1965): 153–60, esp. p. 159 n. 17.

21. Haran, "Observations," 206–7; S. M. Paul, *Amos*, Hemeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 63. Gordis argues that it is unlikely that Uziah did not conquer Edom. Gordis, "Edom, Israel, and Amos," 118. For the revolutionary proposal that the Edomites are the victims in these prophecies of Amos, see ibid., 123–32. Andersen and Freedman also claim that the prophecy was said in Amos's time, before Uziah conquered Elath. See F. I. Andersen and D. N. Freedman, *Amos*, AB 24A (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 280.

22. Because of this, many scholars propose reading vv. 6 and 9 as "Aram" rather than Edom. Haran, "Observations," 206–7; and many others. See Paul, *Amos*, 59 n. 162. There is, however, no basis for this correction; see ibid., 57, 60, and n. 138 refers to Haran. Grintz proposes reading אדון, "master," instead of אדום, "Edom," referring to the Dedanites/Danaites, that is, the Greeks. Y. M. Grintz, "Because They Exiled a Whole Exile, to Deliver to Edom," *Beit Mikra* 13 (1968): 24–26 [Hebrew].

23. See Paul, *Amos*, 57.

24. Ibid., 60.

Damascus (1:3), others are accused of violence against other nations. Moab, for example, is chastised for attacking Edom. Similarly, the nations Gaza and Tyre betrayed and sold to Edom were not necessarily Judean.[25]

I find it difficult to draw conclusions about this issue. Regardless of their own victims' identity, it is important to note that besides being reprimanded for its crimes, Edom is also depicted as a victim. Amos reproaches Moab for its offenses against the king of Edom: "Thus says the Lord: For three transgressions of Moab, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment; because he burned to lime the bones of the king of Edom" (2:1). This series of prophecies thus displays a twofold attitude toward Edom: while the prophet expresses hope and desire to see Edom punished for its sins, he also seeks retribution for the crimes committed *against* Edom, revealing a benign attitude toward them. If so, then not only is Edom not portrayed in an especially negative light, as I posited before; they are even shown sympathy usually reserved for Israel. This sympathy recalls God's command to Israel in Num 20:14–21 and Deut 2:2–8, forbidding them to fight against Edom. Amos's prophecies reveal criticism mingled with compassion toward Edom.[26]

Other Prophecies in Isaiah and Jeremiah

Other prophecies predating Jerusalem's destruction in 586 B.C.E. also fail to reveal any deviant antipathy toward Edom; Edom merely features as a nation among nations. This is the case in Jer 9:24–25; 25:15–31, as well as the cryptic prophecy against Edom in Isa 21:11–12:[27]

The oracle concerning Dumah.
One is calling to me from Seir,
"Sentinel, what of the night?
Sentinel, what of the night?"
The sentinel says:
"Morning comes, and also the night.
If you will inquire, inquire;
come back again."

This prophecy is directed against Dumah, and also mentions Seir. The identity of "Dumah" is disputed; is the name a variation of Edom, or one of Ishmael's sons, mentioned in 25Zz:14? Medieval commentators were already

25. Barton, *Amos's Oracles against the Nations*, 20, 31.

26. A. C. Hagedorn, "Edom in the Book of Amos and Beyond," in *Aspects of Amos: Exegesis and Interpretation,* ed. A. C. Hagedorn and A. Mein, LHBOTS 536 (London: T. & T. Clark, 2011), 49.

27. Childs dates the prophecy to the period of Sanheriv's campaign. See B. S. Childs, *Isaiah*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 153. Gray argues that the prophecy can only be dated according to its proximity to vv. 1–10. In his opinion, the prophecy dates back to the final decade before the return to Zion. See G. B. Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Isaiah, I–XXII*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1912), 358.

divided. Rashi and R. Joseph Kara favored the former opinion; Ibn Ezra and Radak, the latter. Modern scholars are also in dispute.[28] Blenkinsopp and Young explain that Dumah is a play on the word *Edom*. The meaning of the name Dumah is דומם, "silent, still," alluding to the stillness and silence of the dead in Sheol.[29] Others explain that Dumah is Arabia, a place called Dumat Al-Jandal.[30] Wildberger adds convincingly that the latter explanation is more likely given the context of the prophecy, as vv. 13–15 refer to Dedan, which is also in Arabia.[31]

Even if this prophecy does refer to Edom, it is but one in a series of prophecies against the nations, spanning chs. 13–23 of Isaiah (against Babylon, Philistia, Moab, Damascus, Egypt, Babylon, Dumah, Arabia, and Tyre), and it is far from exceptional in length and content. Jer 49:7–22 also predates the destruction, but due to its length, I will discuss it separately.

I have shown that most of the anti-Edomite prophecies predating the events leading up to the temple's destruction prove that the deep hostility toward Edom is not rooted in the Preexilic Period. Even the prophecy of Jeremiah in 49:7–22, who witnessed the temple's destruction, is not anomalous in comparison to his other prophecies against the nations. The sources that display special hostility toward Edom are generally dated after the events of the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E., as we will discuss in the following chapters.

Conclusion

No significant tension between Judah and Edom can be traced to the historiographical or even prophetic sources predating the destruction of Judah in 586 B.C.E. Conflict that does transpire between the two nations is comparable to the tension between Israel and its other neighbors and apparently revolved around economic and territorial issues. Therefore, the deep hostility reflected in later anti-Edomite prophecies cannot be ascribed to events that occurred before the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E.

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28. See Wildberger's discussion: H. Wildberger, *Isaiah 13–27*: A Continental Commentary, trans. T. H. Trapp (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 329. He notes several Hebrew manuscripts with the word *Edom* on its margins. Others have the word *Rome*.

29. J. Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1–39*, AB 19, (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 329; E. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, vol. 2: *Chapters 19–39* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1999), 76.

30. For example: I. Eph'al, *The Ancient Arabs: Nomads on the Borders of the Fertile Crescent 9th–5th Centuries BC* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1984), 72, 119–21 [Hebrew]; Childs, *Isaiah*, 153.

31. Wildberger, *Isaiah 13–27*, 329, 331–33; and J. N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1–39*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 398.

Chapter 4

"But Esau I Despised": Israel and Edom are Enemies

The Attitude toward Edom in the Prophetic Writings

Out of all nations criticized in the prophetic writings, the attitude toward Edom is markedly the most hostile.[1] Anti-Edomite prophecies can be found in Isa 21:11–12; 34; 63:1–6; Jer 49:7–22; Ezek 25:12–14; 32:29; 35; Joel 4:19–21; Amos 1:11–12; 9:13–15; Obad; Mal 1:1–5.[2] This harsh attitude is also relatively prevalent in biblical poetry: Ps 60; 83; 137; Lam 4:21–22. The short book of Obadiah is entirely devoted to the subject of Edom's destruction. There is no way of discerning whether this is the prophet's only prophecy or only surviving prophecy, but either way, the fact that an entire biblical book is concerned with Edom's destruction indicates the importance and centrality of this subject.

Different Explanations for the Enmity toward Edom

Hostility Due to Edom's participation in Judah's Destruction in 586 B.C.E.

The survey of predestruction biblical literature in the previous chapter has shown that this deep hatred was probably not rooted in this period. Another prevalent view is that Israel's hostility toward Edom was a reaction to their participation in acts of destruction during the Babylonians' attack on Judah in 586 B.C.E.[3] Edomite devastation and carnage in 586 B.C.E.

1. M. Haller, "Edom im Urteil der Propheten," in *Vom Alten Testament, Karl Marti zum Siebzigsten Geburtstage,* ed. K. Budde, BZAW 41 (Gissen: Alfred Töpelmann, 1925), 109–17; B. C. Cresson, "Israel and Edom: A Study of an Anti-Edom Bias in Old Testament Religion" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1963), 142. Ben-Zvi's claim that there is no particular hostility toward Edom in comparison with other nations is unconvincing: Ben-Zvi, *Obadiah*, 232–37.

2. I do not include in this list general prophecies against the nations, in which Edom is mentioned as one of many. For example, Isa 11:14; Jer 9:24–25; 25:15–31; Ezek 32:17–32.

3. See, for example, J. M. P. Smith, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Malachi* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1912), 5–6; M. Cogan, *Obadiah* (Mikra Leyisrael; Jerusalem: Magnes; Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1992), 12 [Hebrew]; Cannon, "Israel and Edom," 129–40, 191–200; Myers, "Edom and Judah," 377–87; B. C. Cresson, "The Condemnation of Edom in Postexilic Judaism," in *The Use of the Old Testament in the New and Other Essays: Studies in Honor of William Franklin Stinespring,* ed. J. M. Efird (Durham: Duke University Press, 1972), 125–48.

is mentioned in Obadiah and Ezek 25:12. Ezekiel's description is general and refers to an act of revenge on Judah: "Thus says the Lord God: Because Edom acted revengefully against the house of Judah and has grievously offended in taking vengeance upon them."

Obadiah 10–14 describes Edomite assault in greater detail:

> For the slaughter and violence done to your brother Jacob, shame shall cover you, and you shall be cut off forever.
> On the day that you stood aside, on the day that strangers carried off his wealth,
> and foreigners entered his gates and cast lots for Jerusalem, you too were like one of them.
> But you should not have gloated over your brother on the day of his misfortune;
> You should not have rejoiced over the people of Judah on the day of their ruin;
> You should not have boasted on the day of distress.
> You should not have entered the gate of my people on the day of their calamity;
> You should not have joined in the gloating over Judah's disaster on the day of his calamity;
> You should not have looted his goods on the day of his calamity.
> You should not have stood at the crossings to cut off his fugitives;
> you should not have handed over his survivors on the day of distress.

Obadiah's reproach describes how Edom betrayed refugees, trampled Jerusalem's remains, and even penetrated the city together with its attackers.

A similar source can be found in Joel 4:19[3:19]:

> Egypt shall become a desolation and Edom a desolate wilderness,
> because of the violence done to the people of Judah, in whose land they have shed innocent blood.

The dating of the book of Joel is given to scholarly debate.[4] One prevalent opinion is that he lived after 538 B.C.E., when Jews had begun returning to Yehud.[5] I have elsewhere claimed that he prophesied during the exilic period.[6] Verses 1–2 in ch. 4 describe a reality in which Israel has been exiled and strangers have settled the land. Joel 4:5 relates the plundering of the temple treasures (Haggai, echoing the language of this passage, describes their return in 2:7–8). This information is consistent with events that unfolded during Jerusalem's destruction in 586 B.C.E. Joel reproaches Egypt

4. For a survey of the different opinions, see E. Assis, *The Book of Joel: A Prophet between Calamity and Hope*, LHBOTS 581 (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2013), 3–8.

5. See, for example, J. A. Bewer, *Obadiah and Joel*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1911), 56–57; Wolff, *Joel and Amos*, 4; J. L. Crenshaw, *Joel*, AB 24C (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 23–24.

6. E. Assis, "The Date and Meaning of the Book of Joel," *VT* 61 (2011): 163–83; Assis, *Joel*, 8–23.

and Edom, who were both involved: Edom actively took part in the ravaging of the city, while Egypt breached its alliance with Judah and did not come to their aid when Babylon attacked.[7] Joel does not openly criticize Babylon because it was dangerous to do so under Babylonian rule; this is also the reason Ezekiel does not prophesy against them.[8]

Here, Joel accuses Edom of spilling Judean blood; his description is consistent with other accounts of the destruction. Obadiah also mentions that the Edomites attacked the people of Judah in vv. 13–14.

In his prophecy of retribution against Egypt, Ezekiel (32:17–32) also mentions Edom: "Edom is there, its kings and all its princes, who for all their might are laid with those who are killed by the sword; they lie with the uncircumcised, with those who go down to the Pit." (v. 29).

The prophecy is dated to the 12th year of Zedekiah's reign, a year after Jerusalem's fall.[9] Its main theme is Egypt's downfall; the prophet compares the Egyptian empire's fate with other great empires that have already fallen: Assyria (v. 22), Elam (v. 24), and Meshech and Tubal (v. 26). After listing these empires, the prophet then mentions two small nations, Edom (v. 29) and Sidon (v. 30). This chapter describes how destructive, ambitious nations lie rotting in Sheol, the underworld.[10] The prophet declares that Egypt will share the fate of these nations.

Edom and Sidon's place in this list is difficult to understand. First, they are small nations, incomparable to the mighty empires to which Egypt is likened. Moreover, these great empires have already fallen—and the prophet announces that this, too, will be Egypt's fate—but at the time of the prophecy, Tyre and Edom had not yet fallen. Scholars usually claim that this is a prediction of Edom's future.[11]

The nations in this oracle fall into one of two different categories. The first consists of empires: the prophet predicts that Egypt, the mighty empire, will fall just as past empires have fallen. A second group includes other neighboring nations, but the only ones mentioned are Edom, Sidon, and "princes of the north." It is unclear why Sidon features here,[12] but it

7. Concerning Egypt's attitude toward Judah during the destruction, see A. Malamat, *History of Biblical Israel* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 274. There is no explicit evidence that Egypt encouraged Zedekiah's rebellion, but this seems to have been the case. Concerning Egyptian involvement at the end of the monarchic period beginning in 609 B.C.E., see ibid., 248–75.

8. See my *Joel*, 171.

9. Mention of the empires of Assyria, Elam, Meshech and Tubal, and the omission of Babylon, confirm the early compilation of this prophecy, according to W. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 2*, trans. J. D. Martin, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 171.

10. Various scholars have argued that this passage mentions seven nations. For two possibilities of reaching this count, see R. Kasher, *Ezekiel 25–48*, Mikra Leyisrael (Jerusalem: Magnes; Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2004), 617 [Hebrew].

11. See Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 2*, 177; L. C. Allen, *Ezekiel 20–48*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1990), 138; D. I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25–48*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 229.

12. Block, *Ezekiel, Chapters 25–48*, 229.

is surely connected to the prominent place that Tyre and its sister town Sidon occupy in Ezekiel's collection of prophecies against the nations (Ezek 26–28).[13]

Edom apparently features in this prophecy because of its part in the destruction, even though it is not explicitly mentioned here.[14] This source, like ch. 25, also evidently refers to the events of the destruction: once again, Edom is singled out, although the punishment and prophetic wrath directed toward it is no harsher than the rebuke against other nations. Distinct, extreme hostility toward Edom is yet to come.[15]

Accusations of Edom's role in Judah's destruction also resonate in Psalms and Lamentations. The psalmist in 137:7 charges the Edomites with gloating at the downfall of Judah and encouraging Jerusalem's destroyers to ravage the city to its very foundations:

1. By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion.
2. On the willows there we hung up our harps.
3. For there our captors asked us for songs, and our tormentors asked for mirth, saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"
4. How could we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?
5. If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither!
6. Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth, if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy.
7. Remember, O Lord, against the Edomites the day of Jerusalem's fall, how they said, "Tear it down! Tear it down! Down to its foundations!"
8. O daughter Babylon, you devastator! Happy shall they be who pay you back
   what you have done to us!
9. Happy shall they be who take your little ones and dash them against the rock!

The speaker of this psalm has returned to Judah after exile in Babylon, recalling the mourning for Jerusalem upon arrival on alien soil. Back in Judah, he refers to Babylon as "there": "By the rivers of Babylon, *there* we sat down and *there* we wept when we remembered Zion" (v. 1).[16] The psalm describes the grief of a people cast into exile, and their commitment to remembering Jerusalem. His remembrance moves the speaker to

13. For explanations of the prophecies against Tyre, see M. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37*, AB 22A; New York: Doubleday, 1997), 540–41.

14. W. Eichrodt, *Ezekiel: A Commentary*, trans. C. Quin, OTL (London: SCM, 1970), 440.

15. It is therefore problematic to accept Zimmerli's opinion that these verses about Edom and Sidon are late. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 2*, 169–70. If the prophecy about Edom had been later, the claims against Edom would most likely have been harsher.

16. For example, Weiser, *Psalms,* 794; L. C. Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 239. For a survey of opinions regarding the psalm's background, see ibid., 237–39.

ask God to remember those who caused its destruction. Two nations are included in this request; one is obviously Babylon, Jerusalem's destroyer (vv. 8–9). Additionally, however, the speaker asks God to remember Edom, who encouraged the Babylonians to tear Jerusalem down to its foundations. This is another source that focuses on Edom's participation in Judah's destruction.

Lam 4:21–22 also accuses Edom, apparently on account of its rejoicing at Judah's downfall. Now that Judah's time of retribution has passed, Edom will be punished:

> Rejoice and be glad, O daughter Edom, you that live in the land of Uz; but to you also the cup shall pass; you shall become drunk and strip yourself bare.
>
> The punishment of your iniquity, O daughter Zion, is accomplished, he will keep you in exile no longer; but your iniquity, O daughter Edom, he will punish, he will uncover your sins.

It is generally accepted that these sources reflect historical reality. The source in Lamentations ostensibly dates back to the time of the destruction.[17] Psalm 137 is recognized as a composition of the postdestruction era, when the Edomite's mockery was still fresh and bitter in the exiles' memories.[18] The Psalmist's reference to Babylon as "there" (v. 1) implies that it was composed after the return to Zion after 538 B.C.E., when Jerusalem was still in ruins.

These sources refer to different atrocities committed by Edom during Jerusalem's destruction. Lamentations 4 hints that Edom gloated at Judah's downfall. Psalm 137 relates that Edom encouraged the Babylonian destroyers to ravage Jerusalem to its foundations. Ezekiel 25 accuses the Edomites of actual acts of vengeance. Obadiah is the most comprehensive source and lists several different atrocities, both passive and active: the Edomites stood by and failed to come to Judah's aid; they gloated at Judah's downfall. More gravely, they captured prisoners, betrayed refugees, invaded Jerusalem, and murdered its people. I will later discuss why Obadiah and the authors of Lamentations and Psalms take pains to mention relatively minor offenses when, according to Obadiah and Ezek 25, they are guilty of greater crimes. These differences led various scholars to characterize Edom's guilt in various ways.[19]

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17. The author of Lam 4 seems to have been an eyewitness of the destruction. See M. Löhr, *Die Klagelieder des Jeremias*, HKAT (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1893), xiv–xv. Myers claims that the author of Lamentations had Edom in mind in several places: chs. 1, 2, 5, 10. See Myers, "Edom and Judah," 381–82.

18. See, for example, Weiser, *Psalms*, 794.

19. Cresson claims that Edom took an active part in Jerusalem's destruction: Cresson, "The Condemnation of Edom," 143. Bright surmises that they joined the Babylonian army: Bright, *A History of Israel,* 329. In Myers's opinion, Edom made a small contribution to the Babylonian effort, either directly or indirectly: Myers, "Edom and Israel," 386.

From these sources, it is clear that Edom's participation in the destruction played a major role in Judah's antagonism toward Edom. These acts alone, however, do not sufficiently justify the hostile attitude that develops, because other nations also played similar roles. Ezekiel 25 describes how other nations had a hand in Jerusalem's downfall: Ammon (vv. 1–7), Moab (vv. 8–11), Edom (vv. 12–14), and Philistia (vv. 15–17). Ammon rejoiced at Judah's ruin (25:3, 6), and Moab gleefully noted Judah's fate as testimony to the fact that Judah were a nation like any other (25:8). In contrast to their passive responses, Edom and Philistia actively contributed to Judah's destruction (25:12, 15). Ezekiel 25, dated back to the destruction,[20] does not notably emphasize Edom's part, and the same is true of Jeremiah and Kings.[21] Therefore, although there was cause for anger against Edom for their aggression against Judah, there must have been other contributing factors to the disproportionate hostility toward Edom in many biblical sources.[22]

Edomite Activity against Judah after the Destruction

In addition to their participation in the destruction, the sixth century B.C.E. saw Edomite incursion of the Negev and south of Judah. This

20. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37,* 527.

21. This is one reason Bartlett claims that the accusations against Edom in the Bible are false. J. R. Bartlett, "Edom and the Fall of Jerusalem, 587 B.C," *PEQ* 114 (1982): 13–24; idem, *Edom and the Edomites*, 151–57. Against Bartlett, see B. Glazier-McDonald, "Edom in the Prophetical Corpus," in *You Shall Not Abhor an Edomite for He Is Your Brother: Edom and Seir in History and Tradition,* ed. D. V. Edelman, Archaeology and Biblical Studies 3 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 24; Dicou, *Edom*, 186–87. Because biblical sources contemporary to the destruction do not place any emphasis on special Edomite activity against Judah, Hoffman surmises that the events of the destruction were not the cause of the strong hatred toward Edom. He therefore seeks another explanation. In his opinion, Jer 41 proves that after the destruction, a small shrine remained on the site of the temple, which the Babylonians destroyed in 581 B.C.E. Hoffman notes that this campaign, which was recorded by Josephus, does not mention Edom. He therefore concludes that Edom was Babylon's ally, who aided the Babylonians against Judah. See Y. Hoffman, "Edom as a Symbol of Evil in Prophetic Writings," in *The Bible and Jewish History: Studies in Bible and Jewish History, Dedicated to the Memory of Jacob Liver,* ed. B. Uffenheimer (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1972), 76–89 [Hebrew]. His theory of the shrine destroyed in 581 and the Edomite participation in this Babylonian campaign is doubtful, and it is problematic to rely on Josephus's lack of testimony of Edom's participation.

22. Stuart proposes three explanations for the attitude toward Edom in the prophetic writings. First, he notes that the conflict between Edom and Judah spans the most time: from the time of the exodus from Egypt until after the Babylonian exile (which is also hinted at in Ezek 35:5). Second, the frequency and intensity of the animosity. Third, Edom's treacherous nature. See D. Stuart, *Hosea–Jonah* WBC (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 404. This explanation is not convincing—it is doubtful whether the period of conflict between Edom and Israel lasted longer than tension between Israel and other neighboring nations—the Philistines in particular, who also took an active part in the destruction. It is also worth noting that, unlike other nations such as Ammon, Moab, and Philistia, there is no biblical testimony of conflict between Israel and Edom until the monarchic period.

colonization certainly contributed to Judean resentment.[23] After the fall of Judah and Jerusalem, Edomite infiltration and settlement of Judah greatly increased. This encroachment certainly illuminates why Judah was seized with harsh indignation in the sense of "have you killed, and also taken possession" (1 Kgs 21:19). The Edomite capture of Judean land eventually led to the Roman's establishment of the state of Idumea.

This settlement is reflected in Obadiah, vv. 17 and 19: "But on Mount Zion there shall be those that escape, and it shall be holy; and the house of Jacob shall take possession of those who dispossessed them. . . . Those of the Negeb shall possess Mount Esau, and those of the Shephelah the land of the Philistines; they shall possess the land of Ephraim and the land of Samaria, and Benjamin shall possess Gilead." Edomite conquest is also implied in Ezek 35:10: "Because you said, 'These two nations and these two countries shall be mine, and we will take possession of them,'—although the Lord was there"; and 36:5: "therefore thus says the Lord God: I am speaking in My hot jealousy against the rest of the nations, and against all Edom, who, with wholehearted joy and utter contempt, took My land as their possession, because of its pasture, to plunder it."

Indirect testimony of Edomite settlement in Judean territory during the Preexilic Period can be found in the list of immigrants in Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7. Klein claims that most of the cities in these lists are situated north of Jerusalem, in Benjaminite territory, and some on the coastal plain, but none are in the Negev. He therefore surmises that most of the coastal plain region and the entire Negev were under foreign rule, so the first immigrants were unable to settle in these areas. Edomite colonization extended as far as north of Jerusalem, but was mainly in the south.[24]

These biblical sources are supported by archeological findings which indicate Edomite incursion into Judah from the sixth century B.C.E.[25] One overwhelming piece of evidence is an inscription discovered in Arad, which expresses fear of Edomite invasion:[26]

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23. Cresson, "The Condemnation of Edom," 134–40; Myers, "Edom and Judah," 387–92; Glazier-McDonald, "Edom in the Prophetical Corpus," 23–32.

24. S. Klein, *Erez Yehudah* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1939), 3, 251–52 [Hebrew].

25. See, for example, Y. Aharoni, "Arad: Its Inscriptions and Temple," *The Biblical Archaeologist* (1968): 2–32; M. Kochavi, "The First Season of Excavations at Tell Malhata," *Qadmoniot* 3 (1970) 22–24 [Hebrew]; Myers, "Edom and Judah," 387–92; W. F. Albright, "A Brief History of Judah from the Days of Josiah to Alexander the Great," *BA* 9 (1946): 1–20, esp. p. 6; B. Mazar, B. T. Dotan, and I. Dunayevsky, "En-Gedi: The First and Second Seasons of Excavations 1961–62," *ʿAtiqot: English Series* 5 (1966): 3–4. See also Bartlett, *Edom and the Edomites,* 141–42, which contains an additional bibliography. Concerning archaeological finds in the Negev, see I. Beit-Arieh, "The Edomites in Cisjordan," in *You Shall Not Abhor an Edomite for He Is Your Brother: Edom and Seir in History and Tradition*, ed. D. V. Edelman, Archaeology and Biblical Studies 3 (Atlanta: SBL, 1995), 33–40.

26. S. Aḥituv, *HaKetav VeHaMiktav: Handbook of Ancient Inscriptions from the Land of Israel and the Kingdoms beyond the Jordan from the Period of the First Commonwealth* (Jerusalem: Bialik, 2004), 116–20 [Hebrew].

> From Arad 50 (?) and from Qina. Send them to the Negev Heights in the hand of Malkhiyahu the son of Qerevor and entrust them to the hand of Elisha the son of Jeremiah in the Negev Heights, lest something befall the city. And let the king's word be in your spirit. I have sent testimony with you today with Elisha's people, lest Edom should arrive there.

Much debate surrounds the nature of this Edomite infiltration. Albright and Noth claim that the Babylonians already seized this territory from Judah in 598 B.C.E. and transferred it to the Edomites,[27] while others believe that the Edomites took over the land gradually until 586 B.C.E., whereupon their settlement increased rapidly because of the vacuum created in Judah.[28]

While this encroachment certainly increased Judean hostility, it is doubtful if it fully explains the intensity of the anti-Edomite sentiment recurring in biblical prophecy, even when combined with the resentment at their participation in Judah's destruction. Edomites were not the only ones who took advantage of the conquest of Judah; Philistia also invaded Judean territory (Obadiah 19),[29] and the Samaritans also settled in areas north of Jerusalem. Archaeological findings testify that Judean cities north of Jerusalem and south of Hebron were not harmed in the events of 586 B.C.E.; the northern territory was seized by Samaritans, and the south by Edomites.[30] The tension between Judah and Samaria, however, is incomparable to the prophetic antagonism toward Edom.[31] Myers notes that there was also Ammonite settlement of the area, as is evident from Ezra and Nehemiah's protest against intermarriage between Judah and Ammon.[32] The fierce tension between Ammon and Judah is apparent from King Baalis of Ammon's facilitation of governor Gedaliah the son of Ahikam's assassination, which

27. Albright, "A Brief History of Judah," 6; Noth, *History*, 324–25; Bartlett disagrees: "Edom and the Fall of Jerusalem," 17.

28. Myers, "Edom and Judah," 387; A. Kasher, Jews, *Idumaeans, and Ancient Arabs: Relations of the Jews in Eretz-Israel with the Nations of the Frontier and the Desert during the Hellenistic and Roman Era (332 B.C.E.–70 C.E.)* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1988), 10–11.

29. See, for example, H. J. Katzenstein, "Philistines." *ABD* 5:326–33.

30. Albright, "A Brief History of Judah," 6; Myers, "Edom and Judah," 387.

31. There are also harsh prophecies against the Samaritans, but these sources are not explicit. Haggai 2:10–14 is interpreted as an anti-Samaritan prophecy by J. W. Rothstein, *Juden und Samaritaner: Die grundlegende Scheidung von Judentum und Heidentum. Eine kritische Studie zum Buche Haggai und zur jüdische Geschichte im ersten nachexilischen Jahrhundert*, BWANT 3 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1908), 5–41. This interpretation was widely accepted, for example, by F. Horst, *Die zwölf kleinen Propheten II: Nahum bis Maleachi*, HAT 14 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1938), 208–9. See also my "Haggai: Structure and Meanings," *Biblica* 87 (2006): 531–41. I have also published an article proving that the vision of the *ephah* in Zech 5:5–11 is directed against the Samaritans; see my "Zechariah's Vision of the Ephah (Zech. 5:5–11)," *VT* 60 (2010): 15–32. Foster holds that Zech 7:1–7 is anti-Samaritan; see R. S. Foster, *The Restoration of Israel: A Study in Exile and Return* (London: Darton, Longman, & Todd, 1970), 109–10. This argument is baseless. Concerning anti-Samaritan prophecies, see Coggins, *Samaritans and Jews*, 37–57.

32. Myers, "Edom and Judah," 387.

led to the ruin of the final remnant of Judean settlement after the events of the destruction (Jer 40:8–41:18).[33]

Edom as a Symbol

The lack of a clear historical explanation for the unrivaled animosity toward Edom led scholars to search new avenues. Many have reached the conclusion that the biblical references to Edom in prophetic literature do not necessarily refer to the actual nation, situated south of the Jordan; rather, Edom serves as a symbol of all nations. This explanation is favored by many, although scholars disagree which sources manifest this symbolism. Cresson explains that following Judah's destruction and exile, the Judean community was fiercely at odds with the world around them, and thus adopted a national discourse that configured all other nations (symbolized by Edom) as the enemy of God and God's objectives.[34] Others argue that Edom became the symbol of Judah's enemies because of cult and ritual: the name *Edom* was used liturgically in ritual texts that commemorated Jerusalem's destruction, which led to Edom becoming a euphemism for evil in general. Kellerman holds that in these ritual ceremonies, predicting Edom's downfall was a corrective, hopeful response to the nation's lamentations.[35]

Various scholars therefore interpret many prophecies featuring Edom as prophecies against the nations, either against evil in general or against Assyria and Babylon. This can be said of Isa 34; 63; Ezek 35; Obad; Lam 4:21; Ps 137; and even Jer 49:7–22. Of course, if this interpretation is correct, even to a partial degree, then it cannot be said that there is particular biblical hostility displayed toward the nation situated southeast of Judah; that is, toward the actual nation of Edom.

But this question evokes another in turn: why did Edom, of all nations, become this symbol? The usual answer is that Edom was the most despised of all of Judah's neighbors because of their participation in Jerusalem's fall and their invasion of Judean territory.[36] This logic, however, is circular: if the historical explanations that Edom took part in Judah's destruction

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33. It is unclear whether Baalis had an anti-Babylonian policy or if they acted to prevent Judah from regaining their strength. See Geraty, "Baalis," *ABD* 1:556.

34. See Cresson, "The Condemnation of Edom," 144–48; Hoffman, "Edom as the Symbol of Evil," 76–98; Dicou, *Edom,* e.g., pp. 198–204.

35. Kellermann, *Israel und Edom,* 228; Ogden, "Prophetic Oracles against Foreign Nations," 89–97. Dicou follows in Kellermann's wake: Dicou, *Edom,* 196–97. Wolff holds that the objective of Obadiah's prophecy is to console the ruined, downtrodden nation after the destruction in 586 B.C.E. The prophecy is a ritual reply to the lamentations Israel expressed during their mourning period for Jerusalem, as reflected, for example, in Lamentations, which included a plea for God to punish Edom. Wolff emphasizes that this hatred is not gratuitous, but the plea of a broken, depressed nation who demand justice of God. See H. W. Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah: A Commentary* (trans. M. Kohl. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986), 19–23.

36. Cresson, "The Condemnation of Edom," 144.

and colonized the land do not sufficiently justify the biblical antagonism toward them, then the same reasons cannot rationalize Edom's election as the typification of all nations.

Raabe accepts the various historical explanations for the hatred toward Edom, but not exclusively. In his opinion, Edom became a symbol for the nations due to geographical and literary reasons: he suggests that Edom's southern location aptly suits the comparison with Sodom and Gomorrah introduced in the second half of the prophecy,[37] while in Isa 34, for example, Edom was chosen to represent the nations because the name "Edom" generates wordplay with the word "דם," blood, a key word in this prophecy (Isa 34:3, 6 [2×], 7). He also refers to the wordplay between אדום, Edom, and דם, blood, in relation to Isa 63.[38] The argument that Edom became a symbol of the nations because of the potential wordplay between "Edom" and "blood," (*dm*) however, is problematic, because it is not relevant in most other sources.

Unlike Raabe, Ben-Zvi argues that the prophetic attitude toward Edom is not extraordinary, and neither their contribution to Judah's downfall nor their settlement of the land is remarkable compared with any other nation. His scholarly focus is on the book of Obadiah, and in the context of this prophecy he claims that Edom functions as a symbol of the nations because of the motif of brotherhood associated with them. Ben-Zvi substantiates the motif of "brotherhood" with several explanations.[39] One is that, through relating to the nations as Israel's brother, the prophet seeks to convey that only Judah is considered Israel, while other groups are not, such as the Samaritans, who claimed that they, too, are of the chosen nation.[40] Moreover, by referring to these nations as Israel's brothers, the prophet accuses them of failing to meet moral expectations and of brutal behavior toward their own brother, Judah.[41]

Ben-Zvi's explanation is unconvincing because he only relates to the source in Obadiah, and perhaps, to a certain extent, to the source in Malachi. It does not apply to sources where there is no mention of brotherhood. Edom is singled out for reproach throughout the prophetic writings, so a general explanation is preferable to several local explanations, even though every source has its own unique aspect (this is also the problem with Raabe's various explanations). Moreover, Ben-Zvi's interpretation is improbable because in the prophecy of Obadiah, Edom is explicitly differentiated from

37. P. R. Raabe, *Obadiah*, AB 24D (New York: Doubleday, 1996), 35–36.

38. Ibid., 36. For a detailed discussion of each of the prophecies, see ibid., 33–47. This is not the place to discuss each of the prophecies, but I will note that despite Obadiah's conflicting testimonies to whether Edom is a symbol of the nations or the actual historical nation of Edom, Raabe favors the former without supplying convincing proof. Ibid., 44.

39. Ben-Zvi, *Obadiah,* 230–46.

40. Ibid., 239–46.

41. Ibid., 239–40.

all other nations (v. 11),[42] and there is specific geographic and topographic reference to Edom's actual land (vv. 3–4). It is therefore highly unlikely that Edom serves as a symbol in this context.

The latter problem applies to most of the sources in question, which seem to refer to the actual nation of Edom, rather than to Edom-as-a-symbol. The scholarly conviction that Edom represents the nations is only a contrived attempt to explain the unparalleled hostility toward Edom. In Obadiah, Edom is clearly presented as a political entity within certain geographical boundaries.[43] The prophecies in Ezek 35 and Mal .1 are historically concrete, and Edom is characterized as a nation on specific territory; the same is true of Jeremiah's representation of Edom in Jer 49:7–22.[44] We will see below that even sources referring to Edom in more general terms, such as Isa 34[45] and Isa 63:1–6, wherein Edom is therefore widely regarded as a symbol,[46] in fact speak of the actual nation of Edom.

The hostility reflected in the prophetic writings is ascribed to concrete historical events, such as the destruction of the temple and the Edomite invasion of Judah. Scholars have largely overlooked theological, psychological and emotional aspects on a national scale, as well as the collective grasp of history, even though these factors often determine the nature of a relationship between nations. Exploration of emotions on such a scale is, obviously, more easily undertaken when dealing with modern history, but nonetheless, this field is sorely neglected in the study of ancient history, perhaps because these matters are rarely explicit in historical sources. Yet a careful exploration of the biblical text reveals that the prophetic writings are saturated with such information, and herein lies the heart of our study.

Animosity toward Edom: A New Approach

I believe that Israel's attitude toward Edom is shaped by its interpretation of the struggle between their forefathers–Esau and Jacob. In this context, the degree of historicity of Esau's identification with Edom is irrelevant, as

42. Ben-Zvi's explanation is somewhat contrived: ibid., 242–43.

43. J. Renkema, *Obadiah*, trans. B. Doyle, Historical Commentary on the Old Testament (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 39; unlike Dicou, who argues that, in Obadiah, Edom represents the nations. See Dicou, *Edom,* 26–27.

44. In Dicou's opinion, Edom is a symbol for Babylon in Jer 49:7–22. ibid., 88–104; Raabe disagrees: *Obadiah*, 37–38.

45. Blenkinsopp believes that Edom symbolizes Assyria and Babylon: *Isaiah*, 451. Others believe that Edom stands for all the nations. See, for example, H. Wildberger, *Jesaja*, BKAT 10 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1982)], 322–39, especially p. 339.

46. Thus, for example, Wade claims that, here, Edom represents all the nations, and itself can be counted among them. He argues that Edom was selected to represent all of Israel's enemies because of Judah's anger at Edom's part in Jerusalem's destruction. See G. W. Wade, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, Westminster Commentary (London: Methuen, 1929), 394. In contrast, it is interesting to note that, in his commentary of ch. 34, he claims that this refers to the historical Edom, rather than to a symbol. See Wade, *Isaiah*, 215–16.

is the period in which this approach took root.[47] The perception that Edom is Jacob's brother appears in many sources; see, for example, Gen 25:25–26; 27; 35:29; Num 20:14; Deut 2:4, 8; 23:8; Amos 1:11; Obad v. 10, 12; Mal 1:2–3. My hypothesis is that the people dwelling in Judah internalized this viewpoint through their awareness of the Esau and Jacob stories in the book of Genesis, or similar oral traditions.

Israel held the clear conviction that God was the supreme authority and they were the chosen nation. The story of Israel's selection began with the Abraham cycle and continued with the stories of Isaac and Jacob. Abraham's story begins with his election, and the covenant he forms with God informs the story of the nation's exodus from Egypt. The reasons for Abraham's election are not explicit, although one explanation is provided in passing in the narrative of Sodom's destruction: "for I have chosen him, that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice" (Gen 18:19). Assuming that the nation was familiar with the stories of Genesis, they knew that they were the descendants of Jacob, who was chosen, and that Edom was descended from Esau, who was denied a link in the chosen dynasty even though, according to tradition, he was the twin brother of Jacob. As we saw before, neither Jacob's election nor Esau's rejected is explicitly explained in the biblical narrative, and this lacuna has crucial bearing on Israel's attitude toward Edom. In the book of Genesis, Esau and Jacob are presented in perpetual conflict, conflict that begins before their birth and continues throughout their lives. Unlike its rifts with other neighboring nations, the strained relationship between Israel and Edom throughout history was interpreted as part of that selfsame fraternal struggle. I believe that the tension between Esau and Jacob and their dispute regarding their status as the chosen nation was part of their heritage; they knew that they had been chosen and that Edom, their "brother," had been rejected, but like later readers of the narratives in Genesis, they were not sure of the reason.

Edom and Judah were rival nations in perpetual conflict. Judah may have interpreted this conflict as a deeper, more fundamental struggle than the usual tension that existed between neighboring nations; on a conscious or subconscious level, they may have connected this conflict with Jacob and Esau's dispute over the birthright and ownership of the chosen land. It is likely that the Judeans interpreted Edom's ambitions to conquer parts of Israel as aspiration to restore the birthright and blessing to Esau. When Edom grew stronger, these feelings, no doubt, grew stronger as well.

Judah's conscious or subconscious concerns in regard to the birthright and blessing increased exponentially after Jerusalem and the Temple fell in 586 B.C.E. In the aftermath of this destruction, the nation was broken, and

47. Regarding the development of the fraternal relationship between Edom and Israel, see Bartlett, "The Brotherhood of Edom," 2–27.

understood the fall of Jerusalem and Judah's exile as the rupture of God's bond with Israel. The Temple had been perceived as God's dwelling place, and its destruction was grasped as God's departure from among them.[48] The nation's exile may also have been grasped as their rude fall from the pedestal of the chosen people. Leviticus 18:27–20 states that God spewed the Canaanites out from their land because of their sins and warns that God will also cast out Israel if they sin. This reading has historical precedent: according to Gen 15:16, Israel conquered the land from the Canaanites because of their sin but was prevented from disinheriting them as long as their sin was incomplete.

Judah's religious and psychological reactions to the destruction were derived from the people's assumption that God had cast them off forever. There is extensive biblical evidence of these feelings. In Lamentations (3:18), the people are described as despairing of the possibility that God will deliver them, "And I said, My strength and my hope is perished from the Lord." The sufferer feels that it is impossible to turn to God: "though I call and cry for help, he shuts out my prayer" (Lam 3:8); that all is bleak: "He has made me dwell in darkness like those long dead" (3:6). Yet in an attempt to temper the despair born of God's presumed rejection, the speaker declares: "For the Lord will not reject forever" (v. 31). This lament is designed to reassure the people that despite the harsh reality following the destruction, God has not cast them off forever.[49]

This national sense of rejection is expressed explicitly in Ezek 37: 1–14.[50] In this prophecy, God takes Ezekiel to a valley full of dry bones and asks if the bones will rise up, then proclaims that the bones will once again be covered with flesh and sinew; God will then breathe life into them and resurrect them. This prophecy, God declares, is an allegory: "Then He said to me, Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely'" (v. 11). The dry bones are an expression of the people's despair that they will never return to their land. The prophecy aims to imbibe the people with new hope that God will bring them back: "Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O My people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel" (v. 12).

This fear is also expressed in Jer 33:24: "Have you not observed how these people say, 'The two families that the Lord chose have been rejected by Him,' and how they hold my people in such contempt that they no

48. On this topic, see my "The Temple in the Book of Haggai," *JHS* 8 (2008): 1–10, article 19.

49. See my "The Alphabetic Acrostic in the Book of Lamentations," *CBQ* 69 (2007): 710–24; idem, "The Unity of the Book of Lamentations," *CBQ* 71 (2009): 206–329, 311–13; see also B. S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 596.

50. See, for example, Greenberg, *Ezekiel 20–37*, 744–46.

longer regard them as a nation?" God replies by challenging the people's belief that the two kingdoms of Judah and Israel have been rejected and are no longer the chosen people: "Only if I had not established My covenant with day and night and the ordinances of heaven and earth, would I reject the offspring of Jacob and of my servant David and not choose any of his descendants as rulers over the offspring of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For I will restore their fortunes, and will have mercy upon them" (vv. 25–26). Jeremiah proclaims in God's name that the election of Israel and David's seed is eternal, as unchanging as the laws of nature and the diurnal course of night and day.[51]

These feelings are also clearly addressed in Isaiah's prophecies of consolation. The prophet constantly reaffirms that Israel is the chosen people; his intense repetition is an attempt to counter their fear that God has cast them off—a fear expressed, for example, in Isa 40:27ff.: "Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, 'My way is hidden from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God?'" Isa 43:1 is a reflection of the national angst that they will never be redeemed: "But now thus says the Lord, He who created you, O Jacob, He who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are Mine." (See also, for example, 41:14). The prophet's words to Israel—"you are Mine" (לי אתה) clearly exhibits Israel's conviction of abandonment,[52] and Isaiah seeks to reassure them: "But you, Israel, My servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, My friend; you whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, 'You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off'" (41:8–9). It is no coincidence that Isaiah refers to the people as "the offspring of Abraham"; this is the strongest expression of Israel's irrevocable covenant with God, a bond that has seemingly been called into question.

Israel's attitude toward Edom in the sixth century B.C.E. is a result of the people's despair that God had abandoned and rejected them. Because Edom was perceived as an alternative to Israel, being identified with Esau, Jacob's brother, the nation feared the possibility that God had now elected Edom as the chosen nation in Israel's place.

Two facts supported these fears. The first was Edom's participation in the Jerusalem's destruction and Judah's exile. Because the nation interpreted these disasters as the severing of their relationship with God, Edom's participation could easily have been read as an expression of the divine election of Edom in their place. Due to Israel's association of Edom with Esau, the Edomite participation in Judah's destruction was not interpreted in the regular political context of conflict between two rival nations. Rather,

51. See W. McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah*, ICC, 2 vols., Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996), 2:863–64.

52. See J. N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1–39*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 9.

Edom's hand in Judah's downfall became charged with theological significance in light of Jacob and Esau's conflict in the book of Genesis, where Esau had been rejected, and Jacob chosen.

For centuries, Judah and Edom had been in conflict, and Judah usually retained the upper hand. But now Judah had fallen from grace, and had sunk to the lowest point in their history—God's temple had been destroyed, the kingdom had collapsed, and the people were exiled from their land. Edom was an active contributor to this downfall. Read as the continuation of the ancient struggle between Esau and Jacob, where Jacob was once victorious, Edom now emerged as the new, chosen, victor.

A second fact that supported the view that Edom was now chosen instead of Israel was Edom's colonization of Judah's land. In the book of Genesis, Esau went to dwell in Edom because the sum of his and Jacob's "possessions were too great for them to live together" (Gen 36:7), while Jacob, after a long hiatus, settled in Canaan. Judah interpreted their displacement from their homeland as divine rejection: God, who had brought them to dwell in the land of Canaan, now expelled them. The Edomites invaded Judah's part of God's inheritance and settled there. Again, this act can be read as Edom's supplanting of his brother Israel, who has been driven out by God; as a continuation of the ancient fraternal struggle between the nations. Now Edom, not Judah, dwelled in the promised land.

It was not Edom's mere participation in the destruction or colonization of the land that generated such unparalleled hostility toward them; as I have reiterated above, many nations did the same. Rather, the ideological and theological significance of Judah's age-old sibling rivalry with Edom led the prophets to focus on them, in order to reassure the people.

The connection between Edom's alleged election and Israel's alleged rejection appears expressly in the first prophecy in Mal 1:2–3:

> "I have loved you," says the Lord. But you say, "How have you loved us?"
> "Is not Esau Jacob's brother?" says the Lord. Yet I have loved Jacob,
> But I have hated Esau; I have made his hill country a desolation and his heritage a desert for jackals.

This prophecy is a reflection and contestation of the people's view that God no longer loves them. Malachi asserts that God does love Israel, and as corroboration of his words, he adds that God despises Esau. Why must Malachi prove God's love of Israel by stating that God despises Edom? The meaning of the expression "love" (אהבה) in this context is that God has *chosen* Israel.[53] This is also true in other biblical sources, such as Ps 47:5; 78:68; 132:13. The term "to hate" (שנא) expresses the contrary— God's *rejection* of Edom. This statement is calculated to reassure the people that they are still God's chosen nation; contrary to their fears, Edom is still rejected, and has not replaced Judah as God's people. The reason for the people's fear is not

53. See the bibliography on this subject below, p. 154 n. 5.

evident in this text, but it can be inferred from other sources that it relates to the Edomite colonization of the promised land.

This allows us to understand Malachi's words regarding Edom's fate. Malachi is aware of the Edomite colonization of Judah, but he explains that this is not proof that God has chosen them; on the contrary, Edom has been dispossessed of their land, which proves that they are still rejected by God, even though they now dwell in the land of Judah.

This thesis illuminates the unique nature of the anti-Edomite prophecies beginning in the sixth century B.C.E. The plethora of anti-Edomite prophecies after the destruction, and their call for Edom's punishment, do not simply reproach Edom for their participation in Jerusalem's destruction or their colonization of the land. Rather, the attitude toward Edom is a complex psychological reaction to the people of Judah's interpretation of these events. The harsh, abundant prophecies predicting Edom's punishment were designed to dispel the national perception that God had abandoned them and chosen another people in their place. These prophecies did not only aim to comfort the people by announcing their return to the land seized by Edom, but they first and foremost attempted to contend with Judah's deep despair and frustration. It was not Edom's destructive actions in themselves that generated such deep hatred but the sense that beneath these actions, a desperate, ancient struggle was rearing its head once more. These bitter anti-Edomite prophecies aimed to grapple with the fear that Judah was no longer God's chosen people. The deep-rooted psychological strain born of their devastating loss explains the prophets' need to combat the nation's fear with equally intense reproach of Edom.

Several curious features of the anti-Edomite prophecies become clear in light of this theory. A number of anti-Edomite prophecies are juxtaposed with prophecies of Israel's redemption: Joel 4:15–20; Amos 9:11–15;[54] Isa 34–35; 62:11–63:6; Obad 19–21; Ezek 35–36; Lam 4:21–22. The proximity between the prophecies of Edom's destruction and Israel's redemption is puzzling in comparison with oracles against other nations, but the reason for this placement emerges in light of Judah's attitude toward Edom. Since Edom's humiliation of Judah during the destruction was interpreted as God's preference for "Esau" rather than "Jacob," Judah's redemption must be accompanied by Edom's destruction. Judah can only be redeemed after God forgives them; only then will they be able to reclaim their status as the chosen people. However, the people of Judah presumably felt that this would only be possible with the downfall of their rival for blessing and birthright.

54. Many scholars hold that these verses in Amos refer to the time of destruction. See, for example, W. R. Harper, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, ICC, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1905), 195–96. Harper lists 10 points to prove his claim. Paul explains the verses as based on the eighth century B.C.E. See Paul*, Amos*, 291–92. Amos's reference in 9:14 to the return to Zion makes it seem more likely that the subject of these verses is Israel's salvation following Nebuchadnezzar's destruction.

This theory also explains why the prophecy of Edom's divine punishment in Ezek 35 is not part of the prophetic series against the nations in chs. 22–32, but is rather incorporated into Ezekiel's oracles of consolation and rehabilitation (chs. 33–48). The book of Ezekiel is arranged according to prophecy type, and it emerges that the prophecy of Edom's destruction in ch. 35 is not a regular oracle of doom against the nations, but the other side of the coin of Israel's salvation. I will discuss Ezek 35 at length below.

This explanation illuminates another unique aspect of the anti-Edom prophecies. As mentioned above, some oracles contain criticism of both passive and active crimes against Judah during Jerusalem's fall. Obadiah 13–14 describes Edom's active crimes during the destruction: how they entered Jerusalem, prevented fugitives from escaping, and betrayed Judah's survivors. At the same time, in vv. 11–12, Obadiah criticizes Edom for gloating at Judah's downfall and their failure to come to their brother's aid. Likewise, Lam 4:21–22 criticizes Edom's rejoicing.[55] Psalm 137 accuses Edom of encouraging Jerusalem's destroyers to tear the city down to its foundations. The theory I propose explains why the narrative takes the trouble to mention such minor, passive slights alongside actual crimes of destruction: these "lesser" offenses were interpreted as part of the ancient sibling rivalry between the two nations. Edom's triumph was perceived as the joy of the victor, of the elder brother's reclamation of his birthright and blessing.

Conclusion

Out of all nations, the biblical attitude toward Edom is the most hostile. Most of these strikingly acerbic prophecies were compiled following the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. Scholarly explanations usually attribute this hatred to Edom's participation in the destruction and Edomite infiltration of the Negev and southern Judah. When Judah returned to its homeland, the Edomites encroached on the southern border of the tiny, vulnerable Judean state. These actions resulted in enmity toward Edom, but the extent and depth of this enmity cannot be solely ascribed to their involvement in the destruction and colonization, because similar acts were committed by other nations whose crimes did not evoke a comparable response.

A meticulous survey of the different sources teaches that Israel's association of Edom with Esau was the underlying cause of this hostility. The conflict between Edom and Judah was perceived as a continuation of the ancient struggle between Jacob and Esau, as described in Genesis. Unlike

55. Hillers indeed explains the words of the lamenter as a call for the Edomites to rejoice while they still can, for their end is near. See D. R. Hillers, *Lamentations*, AB 7A (New York: Doubleday, 1972), 92–93. But it seems more likely that these words are criticism of Edom's glee at Judah's downfall. See, for example, C. Westermann, *Lamentations: Issues and Interpretation*, trans. C. Muenchow (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 205.

the clear, explicit divine selection of Isaac and rejection of Ishmael, God does not similarly intervene in the struggle between Isaac, Rebecca, Esau and Jacob. Only later on does God appear to Jacob and promise him the blessing of Abraham. This revelation occurs once Jacob has returned to Canaan and Esau has left for Edom, which apparently determines that Jacob is the only chosen son. But it must be emphasized that the reason for Jacob's selection is never overtly stated in the biblical text.

After the destruction of Jerusalem, the people were convinced that God had rejected them and surmised that Esau, the long-rejected brother, had become the chosen nation in Jacob's place. This fear was certainly exacerbated by Edom's participation in the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E., which was perceived as an act of divine punishment; in Judah's eyes, Edom served as God's emissaries. Additionally, Edomite settlement in Judean territory strengthened the people's conviction that Edom had supplanted them as the chosen people in the promised land.

The prophets sought to dispel this notion; to instill the belief that even after the destruction, Judah was still God's chosen people. In order to achieve this, the prophets emphasized Edom's forthcoming destruction, often coupled with visions of Israel's redemption. The promise of Edom's doom served two separate purposes: it reduced them to the status of all other enemy nations, and it reinforced Israel's identity as the chosen nation—Israel, not Edom, was still elected, while Esau was still rejected.

Chapter 5

Jeremiah's Prophecy against Edom: Chapter 49

The Prophecy against Edom as Part of Jeremiah's Series of Prophecies against the Nations

Chapters 46–51 of Jeremiah comprise a series of prophecies against the nations: against Egypt (ch. 46), Philistia, Tyre and Sidon (ch. 47), Moab (ch. 48), Ammon (49:1–7), Edom (49:7–22), Damascus (49:23–26), Qedar and Hazor (49:28–33), Elam (49:34–39), and Babylon (chs. 50–51).[1]

The oracle of the cup of God's wrath in Jer 25:15–31 implies that the nations are being punished because of an outpouring of God's wrath afflicting the entire region, rather than because of certain sin again Judah. Only some of the individual nations are accused of crimes against Judah: Egypt, Ammon, and Babylon; the rest, however, are not. In fact, Philistia, Ammon, Damascus, Qedar, and Elam are not accused of any offense at all. The prophet reproaches Moab, Edom, and Babylon for their hubris. It seems that Jeremiah's prophecies against the nations chiefly seek to express God's absolute power and omnipotence in the world,[2] rather than to encourage Israel with the promise of their enemies' destruction. The nations' punishment is not intended to bring relief to Israel. Moreover, there is no contradiction between the divine retribution to be unleashed on Israel and on the nations; on the contrary, both seem to be part of the general destruction that will be wreaked on the area.[3]

1. A number of scholars ask how it can be that the same prophet reproaches the people and predicts Jerusalem's fall, while simultaneously prophesying against the nations. For example, R. P. Carroll, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, OTL (London: SCM, 1986), 753. Some hold that these prophecies are dated after the destruction, when the prophet is already able to console the people in the wake of disaster. For example, see T. M. Raitt, *A Theology of Exile: Judgment/Deliverance in Jeremiah and Ezekiel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 114. Others claim that the prophecies predate the destruction and are not intended as consolation for Israel. See, for example, Hoffman, *The Prophecies against Foreign Nations*, 131–29; W. L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 313; L. C. Allen, *Jeremiah: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 458.

2. For example, ibid.

3. Therefore, the very fact that there are prophecies against the nations here is not a reason to date them after the destruction, as many scholars hold. See, for example, ibid., 753–54.

The Dating of the Prophecy against Edom

The historical background of these prophecies is given to scholarly dispute. Holladay claims that the entire series, with the exception of the oracle against Babylon, is dated before the destruction.[4] Others hold that the prophecy against Edom is an expression of Judah's hatred toward Edom because of their involvement in the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E., and therefore date the prophecy after the destruction.[5] This is unlikely; the prophecy against Edom obviously predates 586 B.C.E., as the text contains no hint of any events that led up to or took place during the destruction, nor any accusation against Edom for its part in Jerusalem's fall, as do other postexilic sources, such as Obadiah, Ps 137, and Lam 4.[6] There is no testimony of Edomite brutality against Judah; in fact, the negative attitude toward Edom is not nearly as marked as in other sources.[7] Moreover, within this series of oracles, there is no difference between the prophet's attitude toward Edom and his attitude toward other nations; this is particularly salient in light of the comparison between the twin prophecies of Jer 49:7–22 and Obad 1–9. While the verses in Obadiah are followed by a detailed account of Edomite abomination during the destruction, there is no mention whatsoever of the latter in Jeremiah, so that Jeremiah obviously predates Obadiah.

Many have discussed the question of the relationship between the verses in Jeremiah and Obadiah. Some argue that Obadiah predates Jeremiah, so that Jeremiah draws on Obadiah, while others claim the opposite. Others hold that the two sources both draw on a third source that is not extant today.[8] Given my argument that Jeremiah predates Obadiah, and considering Jeremiah's prestigious prophetic status, it seems that Obadiah was familiar with his oracle against Edom, which he then developed and expanded

4. Holladay, *Jeremiah*, 313–14. Some date these prophecies earlier, between the eighth and sixth centuries. See, for example, G. S. Ogden, "Prophetic Oracles against Foreign Nations and Psalms of Communal Lament: The Relationship of Psalm 137 to Jeremiah 49:7–22 and Obadiah," *JSOT* 24 (1982): 89–97.

5. J. Bright, *Jeremiah*, AB 21 (New York: Doubleday, 1965), 332; J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 720. At the same time, however, he claims that the prophecies' background is the strained relationships between the nations during the monarchic period. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 805.

6. J. R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37–52*, AB 21C (New York: Doubleday, 2004); Hoffman, *Jeremiah 21–52*, 810.

7. Holladay, *Jeremiah*, 2:378. Carroll explains that the reduced hatred toward Edom stems from the fact that the text is not original but a later act of redaction that combines several sources. Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 802.

8. There are three approaches regarding the relationship between the prophecy against Edom in Jer 49:9–22 and the parallel verses in Obad 1–7. Some hold that Obadiah is the original and others argue that Jeremiah is the earlier text, while a third party believe that both prophecies were based on a third, no longer existing source. For a survey of the different possibilities, see J. Nogalski, *Redactional Processes in the Book of Twelve*, BZAW 218 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1993), 61–74; Raabe, *Obadiah,* 22–31; Ben-Zvi, *Obadiah,* 99–109.

on in his own prophecy. I will discuss this at length in the chapter about Obadiah.

The Structure and Cohesion of Jeremiah's Prophecy against Edom

There are various opinions regarding the inner division of vv. 7–22. Some divide the verses into three separate prophecies: vv. 7–13, 14–18, 19–22.[9] Others hold that the entire unit is one prophecy.[10] There are even those who fail to see any order or structure within the different verses that constitute Jeremiah's prophecy against Edom.[11]

It is indeed difficult to determine the prophecy's structure and the relationship between the verses that comprise it. Nonetheless, I will attempt to show that the apparently disparate verses form a single literary unit composed of two prophecies from different periods, merged to form a single prophetic unit.[12]

The two parts are 49:7–13 and 49:14–22. This division is based on the fact that v. 14 contains a new introductory formula. Verses 7–13 describe God's intention of punishing Edom in detail, with God's oath at the end of the passage (v. 13) serving as a confirmative conclusion. Verse 14 is formulated as a new introduction. While the first section makes a prediction, the second half reports the actual gathering of the nations against Edom(v. 14), indicating that the first prophecy is already taking place. The second prophecy might have been stated at a later time, when the political reality began to confirm the prophet's earlier words. This may explain the element of repetition between the motifs of the first and second halves. The utter destruction of Edom is mentioned in vv. 9–10 and again in vv. 17–18, and it is twice stated that Edom will become a wasteland (vv. 13, 17).

An element of continuity is retained between the two separate prophecies. The prophecy introduced in v. 14 is subordinate to the first through a pronoun, "against *her*," (v. 14) which relies on the mention of Edom in the preceding verses.

The content of the second prophecy is related to the first and even completes it. The first prophecy describes Edom's wisdom: "Is there no longer wisdom in Teman? Has counsel perished from the prudent? Has their

9. Allen, *Jeremiah*, 496. Allen goes in this direction because he holds that every poetic unit concludes with lines of prose: vv. 12–13, 17–18, 22. In fact, these verses contain poetic units as well (for example, v. 22a), while other verses in this chapter tend more toward prose (for example, v. 19).

10. Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 719; Lundbom, *Jeremiah*, 325; Recently, J. F. Liu, "Hope According to the Sovereignty of Yahweh: A Theology of the Oracles against the Nations in Jeremiah 46–49," (Ph.D. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2010).

11. Hoffman, *Jeremiah 26–52*, 811.

12. A division into two can be found in M. Bolle, *Jeremiah* (Da'at Miqra; Jerusalem: HaRav Kook, 1984) 594 [Hebrew].

wisdom vanished?" (49:7), while in the second, God's wisdom is directed toward Edom's punishment: "Therefore hear the counsel that the Lord has made against Edom and the purposes that he has formed against the inhabitants of Teman," (49:20).

The first prophecy opens with mention of Edom, while the second concludes with it (vv. 7, 22). All this serves to confirm that the entire unit is one cohesive sequence, composed of two different prophecies presumably uttered at two different times, the first predicting Edom's destruction and the second confirming the first by reporting the assembly of nations against Edom.

Edom's Punishment in the First Prophecy (49:7–13)

This prophecy does not accuse Edom of any particular crime, although v. 12 implies that Edom is clearly not innocent: "For thus says the Lord: If those who do not deserve to drink the cup still have to drink it, shall *you* be the one to go unpunished? *You* shall not go unpunished; *you* must drink it."

This verse raises the possibility that Edom shall go unpunished, which is swiftly rejected by the prophet through the principle of *a fortiori*: innocent nations will not evade God's wrath, let alone guilty nations such as Edom.[13] But Edom's sin is not stated explicitly; rather, the focal point is the announcement of Edom's destruction.

The prophecy opens by mocking Edom that their wisdom will not save them from God's impending wrath (v. 7). Some claim that the wisdom in question refers to particular skills in craftsmanship, or political and diplomatic expertise.[14] It is more likely, however, that the quality referred to is intellectual, philosophical wisdom. Edom was characterized by its capacity for wisdom and wisdom-lore, as mentioned above (under the subheading "Edomite Wisdom"). Here, the prophet taunts that this wisdom will not save them from harm. I believe that the text implies that Edom indeed attempts to avoid their fate by employing their wisdom: the phrase הֶעְמִיקוּ לָשֶׁבֶת, "get down low," continues the theme introduced with "Is there no longer wisdom in Teman? Has counsel perished from the prudent? Has their wisdom vanished?" (v. 7). Edom wishes to escape by hiding in the depths: "get down low."[15] The verb העמיק ("get low, deepen") is semantically related to wisdom, suggesting depth of thought, deep meditation.

13. It cannot be explained that this refers to Israel, who is undeserving of punishment, for this would contradict the general theological and moral message of the book of Jeremiah. Apparently, it refers to other nations, whose sin is not mentioned here: Philistines, Ammon, Damascus, Qedar, and Elam. This is the interpretation of Lundbom, *Jeremiah*, 336.

14. *Craftsmanship*: Tebes, "The 'Wisdom' of Edom," 117–97. *Diplomacy*: Liu, "Hope according to the Sovereignty of Yahweh," 177.

15. Lundbom, *Jeremiah*, 329.

This is the case in Proverbs: "The purposes (עצה) in the human mind are like deep water (מים עמוקים), but the intelligent will draw them out" (Prov 20:5). The roots עמ"ק and עצ"ה in Jer 49:30, are also related to this theme: "Flee, wander far away, hide in *deep* places (העמיקו לשבת), O inhabitants of Hazor! says the Lord. For King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon has *made a plan against you* and *formed a purpose* (עצה) *against you*." This suggests that Edom attempts to use its wisdom, its depth of thought and counsel, in order to avoid destruction. God, however, will not let Edom escape. Though the Edomites seek refuge in deep, hidden places, God will expose them (v. 8); and lay bare their hiding places (v. 10).

The first prophecy concludes with God's oath that Edom will not escape, undermining their complacent belief that they will evade God's wrath through their wisdom. Rather, their destruction will be absolute: "For by myself I have sworn, says the Lord, that Bozrah shall become an object of horror and ridicule, a waste, and an object of cursing; and all her towns shall be perpetual wastes" (v. 13).

Edom's Punishment in the Second Prophecy (49:14–22)

Unlike the first prophecy, the second accuses Edom of the sin of hubris:

> The terror you inspire and the pride of your heart have deceived you,
> You who live in the clefts of the rock, who hold the height of the hill. (49:16a)

Edom's punishment will once again reverse this situation: God will lower Edom, humiliating them and bringing them crashing down toward the earth.[16] The impact of Edom's fall will cause the ground to tremble and the crash to echo until the Red Sea, which is the farthest shore from Edom: "Although you make your nest as high as the eagle's, from there I will bring you down, says the Lord" (v. 16b); "At the sound of their fall the earth shall tremble; the sound of their cry shall be heard at the Red Sea" (v. 21).

Once again, the prophet employs the motif of height to describe Edom's fall: though Edom has risen as high as an eagle (v. 16b), God will unleash an enemy who "shall mount up and swoop down like an eagle" (v. 22).

Scholars unanimously interpret this verse to mean that Edom's enemy will swoop down and attack Edom.[17] An eagle is a common metaphor for an enemy (Deut 28:49; Jer 4:13; Ezek 13:3, 7; Hab 1:8; Lam 4:14). The identity of Edom's enemy, however, is not revealed, and Weiser surmises that this ambiguity is intentional, allowing the possibility that God is the exe-

16. Liu connects the subject of arrogance to Edom's wisdom. In his opinion, the entire prophecy is a single unit. See Liu, "Hope according to the Sovereignty of Yahweh," 197. However, the connection between hubris and wisdom is not binding, even if wisdom literature contains criticism of arrogance.

17. Rashi, Radak, R. Isaiah di Trani. Modern scholars: Holladay, *Jeremiah*, 388; Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 722.

cutioner of Edom's punishment.[18] Indeed, nothing in the text prevents this reading; and God is compared to an eagle in several places in the Hebrew Bible (Exod 19:4; Deut 32:11; the figure of the eagle appears in Ezekiel's description of the divine chariot in Ezek 1:10; 10:14). This imagery may be designed to convey God's exaltation following Edom's descent. The sin of pride in the Hebrew Bible contradicts God's supremacy, and God symbolically rises as the arrogant are humbled, as seen in Isa 2:9–11, and here, with Edom's punishment. The concluding image of an eagle may symbolize God's rise after Edom's fall.

The second prophecy emphasizes Edom's hubris; their arrogant conviction that punishment will never reach them. This arrogance is inverted over the course of the prophecy, which ends with Edom's panic and fear: "The heart of the warriors of Edom in that day shall be like the heart of a woman in labor" (v. 22).

The distinction between this prophecy and its predecessor is clear, despite the clear conceptual link between them. The first prophecy sees Edom attempting to hide, though God reveals their hiding place. The second sees arrogant, haughty Edom perched on high, convinced of their invincibility, but God brings them crashing down.

Jeremiah's Prophecy in Light of the Brotherhood between Edom and Israel

Jeremiah 49:7–22 does not relate to Edom as Israel's brother. Their punishment is completely disassociated with Israel—indeed, the names Israel, Judah, and Jacob do not appear at all. The name Esau does appear twice, however, in vv. 8 and 10.[19] Its second appearance may be related to the possible etymology of the word as something covered, which God then exposes.[20] The lack of reference to Edom as Israel's brother is consistent

18. A. Weiser, *Das Buch des Propheten Jeremia (Kapitel 25,15–52,34),* ATD 21 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1955), 418. Liu also favors this approach and interprets that God is the one likened to an eagle here. See Liu, "Hope according to the Sovereignty of Yahweh," 195.

19. Some are of the opinion that, in Obadiah, mention of Esau connotes the story of Jacob and Esau in Genesis. See, for example, Raabe, *Obadiah*, 144. Liu argues that this is also true in Jeremiah. See Liu, "Hope according to the Sovereignty of Yahweh," 179. However, in this respect, a distinction should be drawn between Jeremiah and Obadiah. First, the motif of Esau is much more dominant in Obadiah, where it features seven times, as opposed to just twice in Jeremiah. Moreover, in Obadiah, mention of Esau evokes the Genesis story because Obadiah openly pits Edom against Israel, and Esau against Jacob, and openly refers to the motif of brotherhood. Jeremiah, however, does not mention Jacob in relation to Esau; Israel does not feature at all in this prophecy.

20. On the etymology of "Esau" in the sense of עשה, "made," see Rashi and Rashbam on Gen 25:25. On the etymology in the sense of "covered," as it is in Arabic, see A. B. Ehrlich, *Randglossen zur Hebräischen Biblel: Textkitisches, Sprachliches und Sachliches*, Zweiter Band (Leipzig: Hindrichs, 1909), 166–67; I. Eitan, *A Contribution to Biblical Lexicography*, Contributions to Oriental History and Philology 10 (New York: Columbia University Press,

with my claim that the hostility toward Edom developed chiefly after the destruction; Jeremiah's earlier prophecy thus fails to distinguish between Edom and other nations. If this prophecy had been composed after the destruction, the attitude toward Edom would presumably have been harsher, as found in other exilic and postexilic sources. Nonetheless, Jeremiah's reference to Edom's wisdom and hubris seems to be related to the similarity between Edom and Judah and to the fact that Israel was favored over Edom, because Jeremiah does not characterize any other nation with wisdom (although the sin of hubris is also ascribed to Moab, to a lesser degree, in 49:29). Accordingly, the prophet emphasizes the fallibility of Edom's wisdom—presumably in contrast to Israel's Torah—and Edom's pride, which is doomed to be rendered into fear and humiliation.

While I have just asserted that the prophecy does not display anomalous negativity toward Edom, three points nonetheless allude to their fraternal connection with Israel. The oracle's attitude toward Edom is thereby unique, despite lacking the hostility of the sources that originated after Judah's destruction in 586 B.C.E. Two aspects present Edom in a negative light; one is positive.

First, the prophet speaks of the loss of wisdom in Edom: "Concerning Edom. Thus says the Lord of hosts: Is there no longer wisdom in Teman? Has counsel perished from the prudent? Has their wisdom vanished?" (49:7). Pfeiffer explains that this verse reflects postexilic Judean wonder at Edomite wisdom.[21] Tebes claims that the loss of wisdom in Edom refers to their unawareness of impending disaster.[22] Haney focuses on the mention of Edom's wisdom in this passage and correctly notes that Jeremiah's attitude here differs from references to Edom in other sources. Her general direction supports the thesis of this study, even though I disagree with her interpretation of this specific prophecy. She argues that the loss of wisdom from Edom is not their punishment, but their sin. Noting the connection between wisdom and God, she also suggests that Edom served the God of Judah. She claims that Edom's sin was to break the covenant with God by losing their wisdom, similar to the biblical accusation that Israel broke their covenant with God[23] and argues that Teman's loss of counsel in v. 7 is a sin punished by God's counsel against Edom in v. 20. It is difficult, however, to read v. 7 as a sin rather than a punishment. Moreover, her claim that the prophet relates to Edom in the same way that he relates to Israel—that is, as a people in a covenantal relationship with God—is problematic, because in contrast to Moab, Ammon, and Elam, Edom is not promised reestablishment on their land at the end of days, as would befit

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1924), 57–58; D. Yellin, "Forgotten Meanings of Hebrew Roots in the Bible," *Leshonenu* 1 (1928): 9–12 [Hebrew].

21. Pfeiffer, "Edomitic Wisdom," 13.
22. Tebes, "The 'Wisdom' of Edom," 99.
23. Haney, "Yhwh, The God of Israel," 100–102.

a nation that has formed a covenant with God. Nonetheless, I believe that Haney is correct that some elements of this prophecy can be explained in light of the perception of a certain affinity between Edom and Israel.

Based on the theory presented at the beginning of this study, the mention of Edom's impending destruction and the loss of its wisdom also challenges the notion that they are a chosen nation who was granted wisdom, comparable to Judah, who was granted the Torah. The description of their loss of wisdom addresses the nation's perception of the similarity between Edom and Israel.

A second point is related to Edom's fate. Jeremiah predicts that some nations will ultimately be restored to their homeland at the end of days: Egypt (46:26), Moab (48:47), Ammon (49:6), and Elam (49:39). There is no such promise to Edom or to the Philistines, the Babylonians, or Qedar. On the contrary, God swears that Edom will be a "perpetual waste" (49:13). Why are some nations granted a bright future while others are not? More specifically, is there a reason for Edom's bleak future? While the divergent fates of different nations is difficult to explain, especially given that the historical background and circumstances of the series of prophecies is unknown to us, I wish to propose a theory based on careful comparison of the different prophecies (with the exception of Babylon, which is anomalous in several respects).

The prophecies about Egypt (46:26), Moab (48:47), Ammon (49:6), and Elam (49:39) all conclude with the expression "says the Lord." This expression also appears in the penultimate verse of the prophecies about Damascus (49:26) and Qedar (49:32). Only the prophecies against Philistia and Edom do not conclude with these words. I propose that, originally, the prophecies about these nations also concluded with the promise that they would be restored to their land and the expression "says the Lord." Following Edom and Philistia's active roles in the destruction (as stated explicitly in Ezek 25:12–17), the promise that these two disgraced nations would return to their land was struck out of the book of Jeremiah. After Ezekiel and Obadiah's harsh prophecies against Edom (post-586 B.C.E.), the option of Edom's future return to their land was no longer relevant. This explains why Jeremiah does not promise that Edom and Philistia will return to their land; it also clarifies the lack of the concluding phrase "says the Lord."

A third aspect relates to the salvation of Edom's widows and orphans in v. 11. As we already noted, in contrast to other nations, Edom is not promised future redemption. But the prophet does state that God will save Edom's orphans and widows: "Leave your orphans, I will keep them alive; and let your widows trust in me" (v. 11). This verse is problematic. The salvation of Edom's orphans and widows contradicts what has been prophesied until 49:9 (and hence Rashi understands that this verse relates to Israel). Some read the words in a mocking tone—no one will remain to take responsibility for the widows and orphans (Radak and R. Joseph Qara read

the verse thus). R. Isaiah di Trani explains that Edom's neighbors will promise to care for their widows.[24] In contrast, R. Menahem ben Simon argues that God will sustain them.[25] This reading is logical, as the words do not ring with irony; they will indeed be saved. Nonetheless, this verse requires some explanation, because no such statement can be found in any other of Jeremiah's prophecies against the nations.

This unique promise can be explained in light of the notion that Edom is Israel's brother. Protecting Israelite society's underbelly, the widows and the orphans, is a central theme, which is even corroborated legally: in Exod 22:21–22; Deut 16:11, 14; 24:17, 19–22; 26:12–13; 27:19. Protecting Israel's weak is also frequently raised in the prophetic writings, for example, Isa 1:17, 23; 10:2; Jer 7:6; 22:3; Ezek 7:10; Mal 3:5. In the book of Psalms, it is twice stated that God takes responsibility for widows and orphans: "Father of orphans and protector of widows is God in His holy habitation" (68:6). "The Lord watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin" (146:9). The privilege of mercy may be granted to Edom because they are perceived as Israel's brother; Edom's weak are protected just as Israel's weak are protected.

The salvation of Edom's widows and orphans is in fascinating, surprising dialogue with the commandment to leave gleanings for the stranger, the widow, and the orphan in Deut 24:21:

> When you *gather* the grapes of your vineyard, do not *glean what is left*; it shall be for the alien, *the orphan, and the widow*.

The prophecy against Edom in 49:9 and 11 reads thus:

> If *grape-gatherers* came to you, would they not *leave gleanings*? If thieves came by night, even they would pillage only what they wanted. . . .
> Leave your *orphans*, I will keep them alive; and let your *widows* trust in me.

The law in Deuteronomy forbids the gleaning of lone grapes from the vine; they must be left for the poor, the widow, and the orphan. The prophet compares the destruction of Edom to the image of grape harvesters, who leave the gleanings behind; in contrast, Edom will be stripped utterly bare. This image, however, contradicts God's ensuing promise to watch over the widows and orphans of Edom. The striking connection between the verses in Jeremiah and Deuteronomy suggests that God observes the law of gleaning in regard to Edom's destruction. The interplay between the Israelite law

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24. As well as Holladay, *Jeremiah,* 2:372. Others have proposed emending the verse. See, for example, BHS; D. P. Volz, *Der Prophet Jeremia*, KAT (Leipzig: Deichertsche, 1928), 416; McKane, *Jeremiah,* 1220.

25. Similarly D. B. Duhm, *Das Buch Jeremia*, KHAT 11 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1901), 355; Lundbom, *Jeremiah*, 332. Haney sees this as part of the covenant between God and Edom. See Haney, "Yhwh, The God of Israel," 111–13; and Liu, "Hope according to the Sovereignty of Yahweh," 181.

to leave the gleanings for the widow and orphan and God's preservation of the Edomite widow and orphan in the stripping of Edom aptly suits the concept that Edom is Israel's brother.

Conclusion

Jeremiah's prophecy predates the fall of Jerusalem, Edom's complicity in the temple's destruction and their subsequent colonization of Judea. The notorious hatred toward Edom had not yet developed, and as of yet, Edom did not threaten Israel's identity as God's chosen nation. Nonetheless, certain subtleties in Jeremiah's prophecy reflect aspects of the brotherhood between the two nations. The focus on Edom's hubris and loss of wisdom may hint at the potential threat Edom poses to Israel on account of its fraternal connection. The other, positive side of this bond is the salvation of Edom's orphans and widows; this brotherhood does not only result in jealous persecution of Edom but grants them special privileges.

Chapter 6

Ezekiel's Prophecy against Edom (25:12–14)

Dating the Prophecy and Its Place within Ezekiel's Series of Prophecies against the Nations

Prophecies against Edom appear in two places in the book of Ezekiel: 25:12–14 and 35:1–15. Edom is also mentioned in 36:5. I will begin by discussing the first prophecy.

The first, brief oracle is part of a series of prophecies against the nations, spanning chs. 25–32. The prophecies are addressed to Ammon (25:2–7), Moab (25:8–11), Edom (25:12–14), Philistia (25:15–17), Tyre (chs. 26–28), Sidon (28:20–23), and Egypt (chs. 29–32), seven nations in all. Ezekiel makes seven prophecies against Egypt, the seventh nation in the list, and scholars have noted that the seventh prophecy relates to seven different nations.[1]

The terse prophecies of chs. 25 and 26:1–6 follow a common structure: each begins with the formula "Thus says the Lord God"; each opens with the sin of that nation, which is introduced with the phrase יען, "because," and concludes with the nation's punishment, which ends with some variation of the motif-phrase "then they shall know that I am the Lord." This structure proves that the first verses of the prophecy against Tyre (26:1–6) also belong to this series.[2] Ezekiel begins with Ammon and progresses clockwise: southward to Moab, Edom, toward the Philistines in the west, and then northward toward Tyre.[3]

Each nation is accused of committing a particular offense—either in attitude or deed—against Judah during the destruction of 586 B.C.E. These prophecies can be dated immediately after this destruction.[4] Babylon is conspicuously absent from this list, nor is it mentioned in Joel's prophecy

1. R. M. Hals, *Ezekiel*, FOTL (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 178; R. Kasher, *Ezekiel 25–48*, Mikra Leyisrael (Jerusalem: Magnes; Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2004), 617.

2. Block, *Ezekiel*, 5–6. Unlike many others who do not include Tyre in this list, see, for example, Hoffman, *The Prophecies against Foreign Nations*, 134.

3. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37*, 522, 527; Block, *Ezekiel*, 5.

4. Hals, *Ezekiel,* 180; Allen, *Ezekiel 20–48*, 66; Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37*; 527. Morgenstern rejects this prevalent opinion and surmises that this refers to a disaster that befell Jerusalem in 486 B.C.E. See J. Morgenstern, "Jerusalem: 485 BC," *HUCA* 27 (1956): 101–79, 111–14. See Cresson's criticism of this approach, *Israel and Edom*, 100–40, especially 100–12, 116–17.

in ch. 4.[5] Some scholars ascribe this to the divine designation of Babylon as God's instrument of punishment,[6] but this claim is problematic because other nations sent as "the rod of God's wrath" were still the objects of prophetic reproach (for example, Isaiah prophesies against Assyria in 10:5–19). It is more likely that Ezekiel was unable to criticize Babylon openly because he lived under their rule.[7]

The fixed prophetic template suggests that Ezekiel relates more or less equally to all nations, and that Edom's actions were not exceptional in comparison with others. The nations' indignities against Judah can be divided into two categories. One group includes Ammon (25:2–7), Moab (25:8–11), and Tyre (26:2–6), whose infractions were not active; Ammon and Tyre's crime was to express joy at Judah's downfall, while Moab taunted that "The house of Judah is like all the other nations" (25:8). Edom (25:12–14) and Philistia (25:15–17) are accused of active crimes against Judah. Both nations are accused of a similar crime and sentenced with a similar punishment (see table 6).

There is no significant difference between Edom's sin and those of other nations in this series. While Edom is accused of vengeance against Judah, Philistia's crime is formulated similarly, and there is no obvious discrepancy between their punishments. Ezekiel does not seem to differentiate between the two groups of offenders—the passive offences of the other nations receive similar punishments as well. In a sense, Philistia, rather than Edom, seems to be singled out here: their actions are condemned as "unending hostilities" (25:15), as part of the perpetual conflict between Judah and Philistine. The description of Edom's sin does not contain such incriminating phrases. This difference may surprise readers who perceive Edom as Judah's age-old enemy, but it is nonetheless logical: as noted above, during the premonarchic and monarchic periods, Judah's relationship with Edom was nothing unusual compared to its other neighbors.[8] In fact, this prophecy emphasizes that Judah was in ongoing conflict with Philistia, which

5. See Assis, *Joel*, 7.

6. G. A. Cooke, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936), 281; Block emphasizes the political aspect, claiming that Ezekiel was pro-Babylonian. Block, *Ezekiel*, 4. As I have shown above, I am not convinced that this position is correct. In any case, there is no basis to his claim that the prophecies of the nations' punishment in ch. 25 are not only because they acted against Judah but because they attempted to stop Nebuchadnezzar, which, in his opinion, explains the disproportionate attention devoted to Egypt and Tyre.

7. Y. Moskovitz, *Yehezkel* (Da'at Mikra; Jerusalem: HaRav Kook, 1985) 106 [Hebrew]. Galambush claims that Ezekiel's prophecies against Gog are directed against Babylon. See J. Galambush, "Necessary Enemies: Nebuchadnezzar, Yhwh, and Gog in Ezekiel 38–39," in *Israel's Prophets and Israel's Past: Essays on the Relationship of Prophetic Texts and Israelite History in Honor of John H. Hayes,* ed. B. E. Kelle and M. B. Moore, LHBOTS 446 (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2006), 254–67.

8. Unlike Eichrodt, who notes here that there was prolonged hostility toward Edom. This hostility is not evident in Edom's deeds here. Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 361–62.

Table 6. Crime and Punishment in Edom and Philistia

	Edom	*Philistia*
Sin	*Thus says the Lord God: Because* Edom *acted revengefully* against the house of Judah and has grievously offended in *taking vengeance* upon them	*Thus says the Lord God: Because* with unending hostilities the Philistines *acted in vengeance*, and with malice of heart *took revenge* in destruction
Punishment	*Therefore thus says the Lord God, I will stretch out My hand against Edom, and cut off* from it humans and animals, and I will make it desolate; from Teman even to Dedan they shall fall by the sword. I will lay My *vengeance* upon Edom by the hand of my people Israel; and they shall act in Edom according to my anger and according to *My wrath*; *and they shall know My vengeance, says the Lord God.*	*Therefore thus says the Lord God, I will stretch out My hand against the Philistines, cut off* the Cherethites, and destroy the rest of the seacoast. I will execute great *vengeance* on them with *wrathful* punishments. *Then they shall know that I am the Lord, when I lay My vengeance on them.*

is consistent with the biblical record of the frequent skirmishes with the Philistines that began during the period of the Judges and continued into the monarchic period.

This source in Ezekiel is vital for our study because it captures the attitude toward Edom at the actual time of the destruction in comparison with the attitude toward other nations. Edom's violation of Judah was harsh but not deviant from the offenses of other nations; in fact, their crime was virtually identical to Philistia's. For this reason, I have claimed that Edom's involvement was not the sole contributing factor to Judah's animosity. I will stress that I am not claiming that Edom's violations were negligible; on the contrary, the prophecies of Ezekiel and other sources describe grave offenses indeed. Rather, I wish to convey that their crimes were not the *only* factor that contributed to the unusual attitude toward them, for if this were the case, then a similar attitude would have also been displayed toward Philistia and perhaps toward other nations as well.

The Prophecy against Edom in Light of Its Perceived Brotherhood with Israel

Despite the similarity between Edom and Philistia's crimes against Judah, subtle differences exist between their prescribed punishments and the different objectives of each. The first is that the Philistines will be punished by God, who speaks in first person. This is also true in relation to Ammon, Moab, and Tyre. Only Edom will be punished not directly by God, but by Judah: "I will lay My vengeance upon Edom by the hand of My people Is-

rael" (25:14).[9] The objective of their punishment also appears different; the other nations' punishments result in their recognition of God's vengeance: "Then you shall know that I am the Lord." Edom's punishment, however, will result in their knowledge of "My vengeance, says the Lord God."[10] Until now, these differences have not received sufficient exegetic attention, nor has a convincing explanation been provided.

The notion that the biblical story of Esau and Jacob symbolizes the fraternal relationship between the nations of Edom and Israel also has the power to clarify these aspects of Ezekiel's prophecy. The story of Jacob and Esau became a paradigm for the interpretation of the relationship between the nations over the course of history. The mutual struggle between the brothers, and God's prophecy, "one people shall be stronger than the other" (Gen 25:23), anticipate the history that unfolds between the nations. Edom's infractions against Judah during Jerusalem's destruction are a fulfillment of this fraternal struggle. When Ezekiel anticipates Edom's fall because of their sin, he designates Judah as the executioners of this vengeance as part of the ongoing conflict between them. When this prophecy is read as part of the struggle between Esau and Jacob, it becomes clear why the objective of Edom's punishment is not for them to know God, but to recognize that God is taking revenge on them. I have already posited that certain religious affinity existed between Edom and Judah. In one way or another, Edom already believed in the God of Israel. Therefore, Ezekiel cannot state that the objective of Edom's punishment is for them to recognize God. Rather, their punishment is designed to evoke recognition of God's vengeance.

Unlike other nations, who will be punished by God, Ezekiel states that Edom will be punished by Judah themselves, which can be understood as a manifestation of the principle of "measure for measure," *lex talionis*.[11] However, this alone does not explain why Philistia is not punished by Judah as well, "measure for measure." Rather, Edom's punishment at the hands of Judah can be linked to the relationship between Esau and Jacob, as part of the ongoing fight for the status of chosen son; Edom's actions against Judah were perceived in a different light from Philistia's actions. Because Edom were potential rivals for the status of the chosen nation, their treatment of Judah was interpreted within this paradigm of sibling rivalry and evoked Judah's fear of divine rejection. The promise that Judah themselves would execute God's punishment is part of the reassurance that Judah had not been shunned as God's chosen people; on the contrary, they will act as God's executioners.

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9. Although scholars have noted this, not all provide an explanation, for example, Block, *Ezekiel,* 25. Zimmerli claims that this is related to the Edomite infiltration of the Negev. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 18.

10. A number of scholars solve both problems by adopting the view that v. 14 is a later addition: Cooke, *Ezekiel,* 285; Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 18.

11. Kasher, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 505.

Conclusion

The prophecy against Edom in Ezek 25 is part of a series of oracles against Judah's neighboring nations, dating to the period of the destruction. Ezekiel accuses Edom of hostile action toward Judah during the fall of Jerusalem. This presumably means that Edom aided the Babylonians in their ravaging of Judah. While the indignities of other nations were passive, Philistia was accused of similar active crimes. In contrast to later biblical sources, however, the attitude toward Edom is not significantly different from the prophet's condemnation of the other neighboring nations, particularly Philistia.

Despite the lack of significant difference of attitude toward Edom, two subtle aspects of Ezekiel's prophecy can be explained in light of the fraternal struggle between Jacob and Esau and the question of the chosen heir. First, Edom was perceived as a threat to Judah's status as the chosen nation, so that Edom's actions against Judah during their most vulnerable period in history became charged with theological significance: perhaps Edom was chosen to punish Judah and supplant them as the chosen people. Accordingly, the prophet declares that Edom *will* be punished for their indignities against Judah, and moreover, they will be punished by Judah themselves, thereby repudiating the notion that Edom's actions were an expression of Judah's rejection.

Second, because of Edom's religious affinity with the God of Judah and their engagement with wisdom, they were already perceived as a people who recognized God. Therefore, their punishment was devised not in order for them to know God—they already knew God, unlike other nations—but in order to suffer divine vengeance; to acknowledge that their defilement of Judah was not an expression of their superiority but an iniquity against God's chosen son.

Chapter 7

Ezekiel's Prophecy against Edom, Chapter 35

Dating the Prophecy

Until now, through the oracles of Jeremiah and Ezek 25, we have seen that no unusual hostility is displayed toward Edom in prophecies that predate or immediately follow Jerusalem's destruction. The turning point in prophetic attitude can be traced to Ezekiel's second prophecy against Edom in ch. 35.

Whereas ch. 25 only mentions Edom's complicity in Judah's destruction, ch. 35 also castigates Edom for its ambition to conquer territory in Judah, causing many to surmise that this prophecy is the later of the two. After the destruction and exile of Judah, the Edomites apparently sought to exploit their absence and spread out, occupying Judean territory, as reflected in Ezek 35. Scholars therefore generally agree that the scene in ch. 35 takes place well after the time of Judah's destruction,[1] possibly even in proximity to the Cyrus Declaration and Judah's redemption, as suggested in 36:8: "But you, O mountains of Israel, shall shoot out your branches, and yield your fruit to my people Israel; for they *shall soon* come home."

The Prophecy's Placement within Ezekiel and Its Relation to the Prophecy of Redemption in Chapter 36

Why is this prophecy located outside of the series of the prophecies against the nations in chs. 25–32 and juxtaposed with the series of prophecies about Israel's redemption? The prevalent explanation is that Edom's punishment is part of the process of Israel's redemption in ch. 36.[2] Indeed, there are many connections between the two chapters, which present Israel's redemption as the antithesis of Edom's destruction.

In both prophecies, Ezekiel speaks of mountains—the mountain of Esau and the mountains of Israel (table 7). Judah is currently wasteland, while

1. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 2:234. See also Hoffman, *The Prophecies against Foreign Nations*, 152.

2. Cooke, *Ezekiel,* 381–82; Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 2:232; Hoffman, *The Prophecies against Foreign Nations*, 152; Kasher, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 678. This is also explains the fact that the prophecies against Gog in chs. 38–39 are not part of the series of prophecies against the nations. The prophecies of destruction of Gog are a notably integrated part of the prophecies of Israel's redemption.

Table 7. Ezekiel Speaks of Mountians

Chapter 35	*Chapter 36*
2. *Mortal*, set your face *against Mount Seir, and prophesy against it,* 3. *and say to it*, Thus says the Lord GOD: *I am against you, Mount Seir;* I stretch out My hand against you	1. And you, *mortal*, *prophesy to the mountains of Israel, and say: O mountains of Israel*, hear the word of the LORD. . . 4. *therefore, O mountains of Israel*, hear the word of the Lord GOD. . .

Table 8. Judah and Edom as Wasteland

Chapter 35	*Chapter 36*
3. I am against you, *Mount Seir*; I stretch out My hand against you to make you a *desolation and a waste*. 4. I lay your towns in ruins; you shall become a *desolation* . . . 7. I will make Mount Seir a *waste and a desolation*; and I will cut off from it all who come and go. 8. I will fill its *mountains* with the slain; on your *hills and in your valleys* and in all your *watercourses* those killed with the sword shall fall. 9. I will make you a perpetual *desolation*, and your cities shall never be inhabited. Then you shall know that I am the LORD.	4. Therefore, *O mountains of Israel*, hear the word of the Lord GOD: Thus says the Lord GOD to *the mountains and the hills, the watercourses and the valleys*, the *desolate wastes and the deserted towns*, which have become a source of plunder and an object of derision to the rest of the nations all around.

Edom will become wasteland (table 8). Edom shall become a wasteland, while Judah shall bloom (table 9). Edom's aspirations of inheritance are thwarted, and punishment is wrought on their own inheritance (table 10). Israel, not Edom, shall reinherit the land (table 11).

These analogies show that the destruction of Edom in ch. 35 is essentially the other side of the coin of Judah's redemption.[3] The parallels between Edom's punishment and the promise to Judah, however, raise the question: why is Edom, of all nations, singled out to be destroyed as part of Judah's salvation? Moreover, it is unclear why another nation's destruction is a necessary component of Israel's redemption; why visions of Israel's destruction cannot be sufficiently countered with visions of Israel's redemption alone. Indeed, ch. 36, which describes Israel's salvation, can be read as the reversal of Israel's destruction in Ezekiel 6 (table 12).[4]

The prophecy to the mountains of Israel in ch. 36 sees the reversal of the prophecy of Israel's destruction in ch. 6. In ch. 6, the prophet predicts

3. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 2:234.
4. See also: Greenberg, *Ezekiel*, 2:723–24.

Table 9. Edom as Wasteland while Judah Blooms

Chapter 35	*Chapter 36*
3. I am against you, *Mount Seir*; I stretch out My hand against you to make you a *desolation and a waste*. 4. *I lay your towns in ruins*; you shall become a *desolation* . . . 7. I will make Mount Seir a *waste and a desolation*; and I will cut off from it all who come and go. 8. *I will fill its mountains with the slain*; on your hills and in your valleys and in all your watercourses those killed with the sword shall fall. 9. I will make you a perpetual *desolation, and your cities shall never be inhabited. Then you shall know that I am the* Lord.	8. But you, *O mountains of Israel, shall shoot out your branches, and yield your fruit to My people Israel*; for they shall soon come home. 9. See now, I am for you; I will turn to you, and you shall be *tilled and sown*; 10. and I will *multiply your population*, the whole house of Israel, all of it; *the towns shall be inhabited and the waste places rebuilt*; 11. *and I will multiply human beings and animals upon you. They shall increase and be fruitful; and I will cause you to be inhabited* as in your former times, and will do more good to you than ever before. *Then you shall know that I am the* Lord.

death, destruction and desolation for the land and its people. Chapter 36 describes the opposite: the renewal of life, fertility, and the blossoming of the land. The textual comparison above illustrates the similar use of language in the two prophecies. One central motif in ch. 6 does not appear in ch. 36—the eradication of idol worship from the land. Chapter 36, on the other hand, discusses the shame of the land and the humiliation of its people in the eyes of the nations, a subject which is unparalleled in ch. 6.

Once the connection between the two chapters has been established, the oracle of Edom's destruction emerges as another, albeit ostensibly superfluous, dimension of this textual network.[5] Why does the prophet include Edom's destruction within this series? And why is the destruction of Edom a necessary prerequisite for Israel's destruction?

The Unique Attitude toward Edom in Chapter 36

In Block's opinion, ch. 35 could have been placed within the series of prophecies against the nations, but was juxtaposed with Israel's redemption to present the destruction of the nations as the other side of the coin of Israel's redemption.[6] Due to its placement, Block argues that Edom in

5. Because of the connection between ch. 36 and ch. 6, some argue that the connection between chs. 35 and 36 is not primary. See, for example, J. Herrmann, *Ezechielstudien*, BWAT 2 (Leipzig: de Gruyter, 1908), 36–37.

6. The reversed structure of chs. 35 and 36 also exists in similar form in ch. 34, which discusses Israel's leadership. Ezekiel 34:1–11 is a prophecy of punishment for the shep-

Table 10. Edom's Punishment

Chapter 35	*Chapter 36*
10. Because you said, "These two nations and these two countries shall be mine, and we will take possession of them,"— although the LORD was there . . . 12. You shall know that I, the LORD, have heard all the abusive speech that you uttered against the mountains of Israel, saying, "They are laid desolate, they are given us to devour."	2. Thus says the Lord GOD: Because the enemy said of you, "Aha!" and, "The ancient heights have become our possession," 3. therefore prophesy, and say: Thus says the Lord GOD: Because they made you desolate indeed, and crushed you from all sides, so that you became the possession of the rest of the nations, and you became an object of gossip and slander among the people. . . 4. . . . to the mountains and the hills, the watercourses and the valleys, the desolate wastes and the deserted towns, which have become a source of plunder and an object of derision to the rest of the nations all around; 5. . . . against the rest of the nations, and against all Edom, who, with wholehearted joy and utter contempt, took My land as their possession, because of its pasture, to plunder it. 6. Therefore prophesy concerning the land of Israel . . . because you have suffered the insults of the nations; 7. . . . the nations that are all around you shall themselves suffer insults . . . 15. And no longer will I let you hear the insults of the nations, no longer shall you bear the disgrace of the peoples; and no longer shall you cause your nation to stumble, says the Lord GOD.

Table 11. Israel Will Reinherit the Land

Chapter 35	*Chapter 36*
Because you said, "These two nations and these two countries shall be mine, and *we will take possession of them,*"— although the LORD was there	I will lead people upon you—My people Israel—*and they shall possess you*, and you shall be their inheritance. No longer shall you bereave them of children.

ch. 36 is more logically read as a universal symbol than as the actual nation of Edom,[7] although he provides no particular explanation for why Edom is

herds, while 34:12–31 is the promise of the establishment of new, suitable leadership and salvation of the sheep. Regarding the double structure in ch. 34 in comparison to the double structure in chs. 35–36, see Block, *Ezekiel*, 2:310; Kasher, *Ezekiel*, 2:677.

7. Block, *Ezekiel*, 2:314–15. Nonetheless, he interprets the prophecy itself as a prophecy against Edom. Block apparently differentiates between the initial statement of the prophecy, which is about Edom, and the redactor's decision to incorporate the prophecy against Edom there, therefore wishing to present Edom as a representative of all the nations.

Table 12. Reversal of Israel's Destruction

Ezekiel 6	*Ezekiel 36*
2. *O mortal, set your face toward the mountains of Israel, and prophesy against them,* 3. *and say, You mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord* GOD*! Thus says the Lord* GOD *to the mountains and the hills, to the ravines and the valleys*: I, I Myself will bring a sword upon you, and I will destroy your high places . . . 6. *Wherever you live, your towns shall be waste and your high places ruined, so that your altars will be waste and ruined, your idols broken and destroyed . . .* 7. *The slain shall fall in your midst; then you shall know that I am the* LORD *. . .* 11. *Thus says the Lord* GOD*: Clap your hands and stamp your foot, and say, Alas for all the vile abominations* of the house of Israel! For they shall fall by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence . . . 14. *I will stretch out My hand against them, and make the land desolate and waste,* throughout all their settlements, from the wilderness to Riblah. *Then they shall know that I am the* LORD.	1. And you, *mortal, prophesy to the mountains of Israel, and say: O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the* LORD. 2. *Thus says the Lord* GOD*: Because the enemy said of you, "Aha*!" . . . 4. *therefore, O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord* GOD*: Thus says the Lord* GOD *to the mountains and the hills, the watercourses and the valleys, the desolate wastes and the deserted towns*, which have become a source of . . . 6. *Therefore prophesy concerning the land of Israel, and say to the mountains and hills, to the watercourses and valleys . . .* 8. *But you, O mountains of Israel, shall shoot out your branches, and yield your fruit to My people Israel; for they shall soon come home.* 9. See now, I am for you; I will turn to you, and you shall be tilled and sown; 10. *and I will multiply your population, the whole house of Israel, all of it; the towns shall be inhabited and the waste places rebuilt*; 11. *and I will multiply human beings and animals upon you. They shall increase and be fruitful; and I will cause you to be inhabited as in your former times, and will do more good to you than ever before. Then you shall know that I am the* LORD.

selected as this symbol. There is basis for his opinion, as the prophet states in 36:5: "I am speaking in my hot jealousy against the rest of the nations, and against all Edom."[8] But it is this very phrase that differentiates Edom from the rest of the nations and defines them as two distinct entities. Moreover, ch. 35 grounds this reference with actual territorial characteristics of Edom: "Mount Seir" (35:1, 2, 6, 15). Verse 15 also seems to draw a geographical distinction between Mount Seir and the rest of Edom: "you shall be desolate, Mount Seir, and all Edom, all of it," confirming that Ezekiel refers to Edom itself and not to a symbol.

8. Block, *Ezekiel*, 2:330.

Others have argued that Edom is singled out among the nations because Judah's return to the land was contingent on the elimination of Edom from Judean territory, due to Edomite colonization of the land following Judah's exile.[9] The question remains, however, as to why the prophet is specifically concerned about Edom's settlement of Southern Judah, when so much of Judah's territory was occupied by foreign nations during the restoration period; northern and western Judah as well as the south, as reflected in the Bible in Obad 19.

The interdependence between Edom's destruction and Judah's redemption is best illuminated by exploring the perceived theological significance of Edom's violation and colonization of Judah. Israel interpreted Edom's incursion of their land as an act that transcended the natural exploit of an enemy's downfall, as they presumably perceived the Philistine occupation in northern Judah, for example. Despite the ongoing conflict between Judah and Philistia; despite Philistine aggression during the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem and in its wake; and even despite Israel's harsh criticism of their actions, the attitude toward Philistia is incomparable to the biblical animosity directed toward Edom. This is due to the theological significance that Judah ascribed to Edom's actions. The Edomite colonization of Judah was perceived as a sign that God had rejected Judah as the chosen nation and elected Edom, Israel's brother, in its place. Judah was already threatened by Edom during the destruction, but Edom's ensuing occupation of the chosen land was interpreted as further proof of their new status as the chosen people. The exile of Judah and Edom's inheritance of the land is a reversal of the situation that determined Jacob as the chosen son, and Esau as the rejected son. Once again, Jacob is banished by their father, while Esau remains in the promised land—surely he, and not Jacob, has inherited the blessing of their father.

Now the theological significance of Edom's destruction as a prerequisite for Israel's redemption emerges. It is not due to Edom's technical occupation of the land, as many have understood. Rather, Judah's status will only be reinstated, and their covenant with God only renewed, once it is clear that Esau is still the rejected son; once Edom, like his father Esau before him, leaves the land. Only then will Judah be confident of their restoration, like Jacob on his return from Haran.

The Prophecy's Structure and Main Content

This prophecy is formulated as God's direct speech to Edom.[10] Verses 1–2 serve as an introduction, and the rest is divided into four parts: vv. 3–4,

9. See above, pp. 79–82.

10. Verses 7–8 discuss Mount Seir in the third person. Greenberg sees this as an indication that the actual addressees of the prophecy are the Judean exiles. See Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37*, 714.

5–9, 10–13, and 14–15.[11] The first, second, and fourth parts all conclude with the expression "and you shall know that I am the Lord," (vv. 4, 9, 15). In the third, the expression appears in v. 12 rather than at the section's end. The three final sections describe Edom's iniquity, followed by their punishment; the second and third section are shaped by the phrases "because . . . [sin] . . . therefore, as I live, says the Lord God . . . [punishment]" (vv. 5–6, 10–11). The first and fourth sections contain the formula "Thus says the Lord God" (vv. 3, 14).

> And you shall say to it, *Thus says the Lord God*: I am against you, Mount Seir; I stretch out My hand against you to make you a desolation and a waste. I lay your towns in ruins; you shall become a desolation, *and you shall know that I am the Lord*. (vv. 3–4)

> *Because* you cherished an ancient enmity, and gave over the people of Israel to the power of the sword at the time of their calamity, at the time of their final punishment; *therefore, as I live*, says the Lord God, I will prepare you for blood, and blood shall pursue you; since you did not hate bloodshed, bloodshed shall pursue you. I will make Mount Seir a waste and a desolation; and I will cut off from it all who come and go. I will fill its mountains with the slain; on your hills and in your valleys and in all your watercourses those killed with the sword shall fall. I will make you an eternal desolation, and your cities shall never be inhabited. *Then you shall know that I am the Lord*. (vv. 5–9)

> *Because* you said, "These two nations and these two countries shall be mine, and we will take possession of them"—although the Lord was there—*therefore, as I live, says the Lord* God, I will deal with you according to the anger and envy that you showed because of your hatred against them; and I will meet with them, when I judge you. *You shall know that I, the* Lord, have heard all the abusive speech that you uttered against the mountains of Israel, saying, "They are laid desolate, they are given us to devour." (vv. 10–13)

> And you magnified yourselves against Me with your mouth, and multiplied your words against Me; I heard it. *Thus says the Lord* God: As the

11. A similar division can be found in Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 2:232; and Allen, *Ezekiel 20–48*, 169. Greenberg's division is vv. 3–4, 5–9, 10–15; Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37*, 722–23. The disadvantage of this division is that it does not take the fourth opening formula at the beginning of v. 14 into account. And from a point of view of content, this verse introduces a new sin: Edom's rejoicing at Judah's fall. Hoffman divides the verses thus: vv. 2–4, 5, 6–9, 10, 11–12a, 12b–13, 14–15; Hoffman, *The Prophecies against Foreign Nations*, 151 n. 68. The advantage of this division is that the words "and you shall know the Lord" at the beginning of v. 12 serves as a closing formula, like in the other sections. However, the problem with this division is that, despite the consistency of the latter concluding formula, while the other sections open with the description of a sin, v. 12b does not seem to be a new introduction. Block divides the verses thus: vv. 3–4, 5–9, 10–12a, 12b–15. Block, *Ezekiel*, 314. This division has yet another disadvantage: it fails to take the obvious introductory formula of v. 14 into account. Therefore, Zimmerli's division seems the most reasonable.

> whole earth rejoices, I will make you desolate. As you rejoiced over the inheritance of the house of Israel, because it was desolate, so I will deal with you; you shall be desolate, Mount Seir, and all Edom, all of it. *Then they shall know that I am the Lord*. (vv. 14–15)

This division facilitates analysis of the prophet's intentions in each section. Unlike the three sections that follow, the first section (vv. 3–4) mentions punishment but lacks description of sin, a lacuna I will address below.

I will first explore the second section (vv. 5–9), which opens with the phrase "because," introducing sin, and continues with "therefore, as I live, says the Lord God," which precedes punishment. The section concludes with the declaration "and you shall know that I am the Lord."

In this section, the prophet accuses Edom of military action against Judah during Jerusalem's destruction: "Because you cherished an eternal enmity, and gave over the people of Israel to the power of the sword at the time of their calamity, at the time of their final punishment" (v. 5). The phrase "at the time of their calamity, at the time of their final punishment" refers to the destruction. Ezekiel defines this event as the time that led to Israel's ruin and explicitly speaks of Edom's military affront against them. According to the prophet, Edom attacked Judah because of שנאת עולם, an eternal enmity. The word עולם usually signifies eternity: Edom participated in Judah's destruction because of a deep, ancient hatred toward them.[12]

Edom's punishment follows the principle of measure for measure. Edom is accused of slaying Judah by the sword; in return, the prophet emphasizes that the Edomites will be slain until the valleys and watercourses are scattered with their corpses. The slaughter will be so great that no passers-by will remain, the land will remain desolate, and the cities will never be resettled (vv. 6–9). This punishment is a result of Edom's "*eternal* enmity" (v. 5); for this iniquity the land of Edom is rendered into an "*eternal* wasteland" (v. 9), measure for measure.[13]

Like the second section, the third (vv. 10–13) opens with the word *because*, followed by Edom's sin, and continues with "therefore, as I live, says the Lord God," introducing their punishment. This section does not conclude with the formula "and you shall know that I am the Lord"; rather, the latter appears in v. 12. I will propose an explanation for this slight variation below.

The sin described in this section is Edom's ambition to conquer Judah and Israel's land: "Because you said, 'These two nations and these two countries shall be mine, and we will take possession of them'—although the Lord was there" (v. 10). This is also repeated in the next chapter, which describes Israel's redemption: "Therefore thus says the Lord God: I am speaking in My hot jealousy against the rest of the nations, and against

12. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 2:235.
13. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37*, 714.

all Edom, who, with wholehearted joy and utter contempt, took My land as their possession, because of its pasture, to plunder it" (36:5). Deviating from the normal pattern of this prophecy, Ezekiel describes this violation once more, and concludes the section thus: "I have heard all the abusive speech that you uttered against the mountains of Israel, saying, 'They are laid desolate, they are given us to devour.' And you magnified yourselves against Me with your mouth, and multiplied your words against Me; I heard it" (vv. 12b–13). In these words, the prophet repeats the sin he describes at the beginning of the section. This repetition explains the usual concluding formula's placement at the beginning of v. 12; the second sin (v. 10) and punishment (v. 11) are followed with the formula "and you shall know that I am the Lord." The displacement of this statement draws attention to the fact that this section focuses on Edom's sin, while the description of the punishment is brief and vague, consisting of just one verse, in contrast to the second section of the prophecy, where the punishment spans three verses (vv. 6–8). The punishment of v. 11 is not only brief but extremely general: "therefore, as I live, says the Lord God, I will deal with you according to the anger and envy that you showed because of your hatred against them; and I will meet with them, when I judge you." This description only states that God will deal with Edom in anger and judge them; unlike the previous section, Edom's actual fate is not specified. This lack of detail is difficult to explain; the prophet may be relying on the punishment mentioned in the previous section: total destruction of the land, its decline into eternal wasteland, and the mass slaughter of its population. The prophet's brevity following so harsh a decree is logical—what could possibly be piled on such total destruction?—but the formulation of the vague punishment he does mention reveals a unique aspect that I will shortly discuss.

On the other hand, this section is largely devoted to Edom's sin; as already mentioned, the sin is first described at the beginning of the passage, after the opening formula "because," and features again at length in v. 13, after the concluding formula "and you shall know that I am the Lord." I believe that the issue of inheriting the land is emphasized because Judah perceived it as a central indication of Edom's newfound status as chosen nation instead of Israel. The prophet cites Edom's words: "Because you said, "These two nations and these two countries shall be mine, and we will take possession of them." The words *shall be mine* are neutral, but the words *take possession*, which otherwise seem superfluous, add theological weight to their declaration. The root ירש, "to inherit" or "take possession," usually refers to inheritance of the land of Canaan, especially in relation to God's covenant with the forefathers. Before Jacob flees to Haran, Isaac blesses him using this word. When the term *inheritance* is placed in Edom's mouth, it becomes charged with the significance of a chosen nation dwelling in the chosen land. Accordingly, the description of Edom's punishment emphasizes that God will punish Edom for their ambition to take possession of

Judah and Israel's land because it is *not* God's will, and there is *no* theological significance to their settlement of Israelite territory. Rather, Edom's ambition is perceived not only as mutiny against Israel, but as mutiny against God: "'These two nations and these two countries shall be mine, and we will take possession of them'—*although the Lord was there*." Edomite colonization, the prophet declares, does not reflect God's will—it opposes God's will and the fact that God still dwells in Judah's land.[14] This is a harsh expression that conveys the tension between God and Edom.[15] This conflict is also expressed in vv. 12b–13:

> I have heard all the abusive speech
> that you uttered against the mountains of Israel, saying,
> "They are laid desolate, they are given us to devour."
> And you magnified yourselves against me with your mouth,
> and multiplied your words against me; I heard it.

The repetition of the declaration that God has "heard" creates a chiasm that designates Edom's actions as a transgression of God's will. Moreover, the verse defines Edom's actions as an atrocity against the land itself, so that the land is unable to contain the Edomites. This is the antithesis of Ezekiel's statement in ch. 36 that the land anticipates the return of its people, Judah. This personification of the land helps the nation internalize the fact that Edom is unable to claim the land for its own; the very soil rejects them

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14. This claim seems to contradict the idea that God left the land following the destruction (Ezek 8–11) and that He returned together with the redemption, 48:35. See also Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37*, 715. The simple explanation for this is that, when Ezekiel speaks of God's abandonment of the land, he does so metaphorically, having left in the sense that the covenant with Israel seems to have been broken. But because this connection was not broken, God does not abandon the land absolutely. God's temporary disconnection from Israel does not mean that the land is now like any other land; the land still awaits the nation's return, as is evident in ch. 36.

15. In light of the problem raised in the previous comment, we can propose that the phrase "God was there" does not contradict the Edomite desire to dwell in the land, but, on the contrary, it emphasizes that they wished to settle the land *because* God was there—of course, it must be emphasized, this is how Judah perceived it. According to this perception, the underlying concept of the entire prophecy—the prophet's motivation to dispel the Judean notion that God has chosen Edom in their place, becomes very significant in light of these words, which ascribe explicit theological intentions to Edom's actions. Lust explains that the prophecy does not relate to Edom but is directed against the inhabitants of Jerusalem who remained there, believing that God is still with them. According to this reading, the prophet's intention is to state that God was in Jerusalem in the past but is there no longer, and so the inhabitants of Jerusalem, referred to as "Edom," have no right to be there. See J. Lust, "Edom: Adam in Ezekiel, in MT and LXX," in *Studies in the Hebrew Bible, Qumran, and the Septuagint Presented to Eugene Ulrich*, ed. P. W. Flint et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 392. This explanation is highly unlikely. One point that can be raised is that the prophecy against Edom here is, in many senses, consistent with the prophecy against Edom in Obadiah. Beyond this, it is unclear how he can explain the prophet's accusation of the addressees' participation in the destruction and their joy at Judah's downfall. It is peculiar to accuse the remaining inhabitants of Jerusalem of these offenses.

because Edomite settlement offends both God and the land. This idea is repeated and developed in Ezekiel's prophecy of redemption in 36:5–6. The fact that Edom is defiling the land with its presence, rather than inheriting it, becomes a basis for the land's redemption in ch. 36, when God addresses the land itself.

Herein lies the difference between the sin of vv. 11 and 13. Verse 11 emphasizes Edom's mutiny against God and the nation, while v. 13 conveys how Edom distresses God and the land. The prophet's emphasis on different aspects of the issue is calculated to dispel any theological impressions that Edom's actions or declarations may have made on Israel, to reassure them that Edom's colonization does not represent the will of God but rather contradicts it and even offends the land itself. The structure of the second half of this section (vv. 12b–13) illustrates this well; opening with "I have heard," the two entities offended by Edom are then represented: the mountains of Israel, "all the abusive speech that you uttered against the mountains of Israel," and God: "And you magnified yourselves against Me with your mouth, and multiplied your words against Me."

In light of the people's mindset, we can now understand another aspect of the prophet's description of Edom's punishment. Even though the punishment mentioned is brief and vague, the prophet includes the phrase "I will meet with them, when I judge you." Edom will be judged for their sin; they will stand trial before God and have to answer for their crimes. This will come to pass, the prophet states, when "I will meet with them"; when God once again appears among Israel, and becomes reunited with them.[16] The word וְנוֹדַעְתִּי, "I will meet," also appears in the description of the tabernacle, above the cherubim, from where God appears to speak with Moses:

> There *I will meet with you* (וְנוֹעַדְתִּי לְךָ) and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the covenant, I will deliver to you all My commands for the Israelites. (Exod 25:22)

> at the entrance of the *tent of meeting* (אוהל מועד) before the Lord, where I will meet with you, to speak to you there. (Exod 29:42)

> You shall place it in front of the curtain that is above the ark of the covenant, in front of the mercy seat that is over the covenant, where *I will meet with you*. (Exod 30:6)

The word appears in a slightly different form as an expression of the divine presence among Israel, not above the Cherubim but at the entrance of the tent of meeting: "I will meet (וְנֹעַדְתִּי) with the Israelites there, and it shall be sanctified by My glory" (Exod 29:43).

The word is given special expression in Ezekiel: the divine presence and God's word will not appear inside the Sanctuary, but among Israel itself. Edom has not truly replaced Israel: Edom is promised punishment, while

16. M. Görg, "יעד," *TDOT* 6:135–44.

Israel is promised the return of the divine presence among them. (A similar phenomenon occurs in Ezek 39: there, too, God promises to dwell among Israel and punish Gog; see, for example, v. 6). This expression again relates to the events that occur during the exile and the nation's interpretation of their significance. Because the people fear that Edom has replaced them, the promise of Edom's judgment is insufficient; they also need reassurance of their special bond with God, and this is expressed in the word נועדתי, suggesting intimate meeting, which symbolizes the connection between them.

The fourth section (vv. 14–15) also opens with the expression "thus says the Lord God" and concludes with this prophecy's refrain: "and they shall know that I am the Lord." This section also features a transgression and a penalty. Here, Edom's sin is their joy that Israel's inheritance has become a wasteland, and they are to be punished according to the principle of measure for measure: the land of Edom shall become a wasteland.

In this section, sin and punishment are twice interspersed, and followed by emphasis of punishment:

14. As the whole earth rejoices / I will make you desolate.
15. As you rejoiced over the inheritance of the house of Israel, because it was desolate / so I will deal with you;
you shall be desolate, Mount Seir, and all Edom, all of it.

The first hemistich of the first line presents Edom's sin: "As the whole earth rejoices," and punishment follows in the second hemistich: "I will make you desolate." The second line retains the same structure: punishment follows sin, but while the sin is detailed, the punishment is not; rather, the prophet uses the phrase "so I will deal with you." The third line, however, describes the punishment at greater length; both Mount Seir and the entire land of Edom will become wasteland.

The pattern of the first two lines emphasizes the concept of measure for measure: Edom is being punished according to its deeds. The third line, which repeats the punishment, serves to highlight the punishment as the chapter's culmination by defining its geographical scope.

The problematic aspect of this section is the apparent triviality of the sin. After the prophet has already presented how Edom was complicit in the fall of Judah and described their infiltration of Judah's territory—that is, two severe, active offenses—why is Edom's rejoicing significant? I have already explained that such seemingly slight infractions had grave emotional and psychological implications—because Judah interpreted their acts as a threat and even nullification of their own chosen status, Edom's emotions were also regarded with significance. Both this chapter and vv. 11–14 of Obadiah criticize Edom for their gloating alongside accusations of more concrete offenses.

I will now return to the first section of the prophecy, which has a clear introduction and conclusion: "Thus says the Lord God" and "you shall

know that I am the Lord." There is no mention of sin; only punishment. Edom will become a wasteland—the word שממה appears twice, and a similar word, משמה, also meaning desolation or wasteland, is used once. Why is this introductory section devoid of sin; moreover, what information does this section provide that is not repeated in the following sections? The tidings that Edom will become a wasteland are also thrice repeated in the second section; once in the third section, and thrice more in the fourth. One possibility is that the first section is meant merely to introduce the central theme. I find this option problematic: why would punishment be sentenced without sin? Moreover, there is no structural indication that the first section is introductory; on the contrary, it parallels the structure of the fourth section. The first and last are parallel, as are the second and third. This only reinforces the question: why is there no crime mentioned in the first section? I believe that the answer is related to the prophet's employment of rhetoric. In the second, third, and fourth sections, punishment is a result of sin. The prophet wishes to open, however, by asserting that Edom's punishment is absolute: they will meet their doom because their fate has been sealed; their obliteration is inevitable regardless of any change or circumstance. Once Edom's ultimate fate has been decreed, the next three sections explicate the reason for their punishment, mentioning three different sins Edom has committed.

Ezekiel's prophecy against Edom is a formidable, sound structure, with each component reinforcing and expanding the previous section.[17] The first section, vv. 3–4, establishes Edom's fate as a doomed nation by mentioning punishment disassociated from any sin. The second section, vv. 5–9, describes Edom's participation in the destruction of Jerusalem, and the destruction that awaits them in return. The third section, vv. 10–13, mentions Edom's sinful ambition to inherit the land of Judah, and their subsequent punishment. The fourth section, vv. 14–15, describes Edom's rejoicing at Judah's downfall and their retribution.

Conclusion

Ezekiel's prophecy against Edom in ch. 35 is not part of his series of prophecies against the nations. However, it is not an independent prophecy, but a declaration juxtaposed with the prophecy of Israel's redemption in ch. 36; in fact, the prophecies are so closely tied that they should be considered a single sequence. Chapter 35 is excluded from the series of prophecies against the nations because Edom's destruction is essentially a preliminary stage and a prerequisite of Israel's redemption.

Many have questioned why the destruction of Edom, of all nations, is so closely linked to Israel's redemption. Its unusual place in Ezekiel's prophecies ostensibly raises the possibility that the oracle does not discuss the

17. Unlike Zimmerli, *Ezekiel*, 2:233.

actual nation of Edom, but Edom as a symbol of all nations, or of evil—yet this cannot be so, for the text clearly distinguishes between Edom and the rest of the nations. Moreover, Edom features in a literal sense, as a nation dwelling within defined geographical boundaries. And the question still remains as to why Edom was singled out among other nations who occupied Judean territory.

The juxtaposition of Edom's destruction and Israel's redemption comes to light, however, when Judah's perception of events is taken into account. Upon the fall of Jerusalem and their exile, the nation feared that they had been rejected by God while Edom, descended from Jacob's "evil twin," had now risen to take their place. From a theological and psychological view, the people needed to be reassured of Edom's destruction as a prerequisite to their own redemption.

Ezekiel's prophecy is clearly structured. It is divided into four parts, each with recognizable opening and closing formulas. Each section accuses Edom of a different crime, the second denounces Edom for their participation in Judah's destruction, the third for their grievous ambition to inherit Judah's land, and the fourth for their glee at their downfall and the desolation of their land. Each sin is followed by the description of the punishment that awaits them, based on the principle of measure for measure. The first part of the prophecy does not feature a sin but focuses solely on Edom's impending destruction; this can be explained as the prophet's desire to challenge the nation's perception of Edom as the new chosen nation. Regardless of their actual transgressions, emphasizes Ezekiel, they are a nation doomed to failure. They are not God's chosen people.

Several of the oracle's motifs are directly related to its underlying theology. Thus, Edom's rejoicing at Judah's downfall is not eclipsed by its greater atrocities; this action, seemingly trivial, *is* significant because of its psychological and theological effects on the nation of Judah. Edom's emotions are significant because their bearing on Judah's emotions is significant, and for this reason, they fall under the prophet's scrutiny. The prophet's criticism is calculated to reassure Israel that Edom have not usurped Israel as the chosen nation, and he therefore emphasizes that Edom's sins are not only a violation against Judah but a violation against God, and even against the land itself.

Chapter 8

Isaiah's Prophecy against Edom, Chapter 34

Introduction

Chapter 34 of Isaiah envisions the destruction of Edom and the nations, describing God's slaughter of the Edomites and the decline of Edom's fertile soil into wasteland. Chapter 35 anticipates Israel's redemption, describing the exiles' return to Zion and the blooming of the wilderness. Edom's oracle is excluded from Isaiah's series of prophecies against the nations in chs. 13–21. The most reasonable explanation for this placement is ch. 34's connection to the prophecies of redemption of ch. 35. Edom's destruction is presented as a preliminary, integral stage of Israel's redemption depicted in the series of prophecies between ch. 22 and 35.

The Relationship between Edom's Destruction (Chapter 34) and Israel's Redemption (Chapter 35)

Some scholars are not convinced of any relationship between the two chapters, nor of the connection between Edom's destruction and Israel's salvation.[1] However, the opinion that both chapters comprise a single unit, and that Edom's destruction is a prerequisite for Israel's return, is more widely accepted. This connection, after all, is the most adequate explanation for the placement of Edom's oracle outside of the series of prophecies against the nations, and most scholars adopt this view.[2] From this perspective, these chapters are very similar to the juxtaposition of Edom's fall and Judah's rise in Ezek 35–36.[3]

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1. This opinion was raised by H. Graetz, "Isaiah XXXIV and XXXV," *JQR* 4 (1891): 1–8; Wildberger, *Jesaja*, 1355. In his opinion, Israel's salvation in ch. 35 was not contingent on destruction of the nations. O. H. Steck, *Bereitete Heimkehr: Jesaja 35 als redaktionelle Brücke zwischen dem Ersten und Zweiten Jesaja*, SBS, 121 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1985), 49–59.

2. C. C. Torrey, *The Second Isaiah: A New Interpretation* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1929), 279; R. E. Clements, *Isaiah 1–39* (NCBC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 272; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah*, 450; C. R. Mathews, *Defending Zion: Edom's Desolation and Jacob's Restoration (Isaiah 34–35)* in Context, BZAW 236 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1995); P. D. Miscall, *Isaiah*, Readings: A New Biblical Commentary (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 84–85; J. D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 34–66*, WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 532–33; and many others.

3. Mathews, *Defending Zion*, 116–19.

Scholars have noted few linguistic or thematic connections between the two chapters; indeed, there are not many to be found. Nonetheless, a few perceptible connections do point to a direct link between Edom's destruction and Israel's redemption.[4]

Edom's destruction will be eternal: "Night and day it shall not be quenched; its smoke shall go up forever. From generation to generation it shall lie waste; no one shall pass through it forever and ever" (34:10). Its only inhabitants will be wild beasts: "they shall possess it forever, from generation to generation they shall live in it" (v. 17). In stark contrast to Edom, Israel shall return to its land and be granted eternal joy: "And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads" (35:10). While Edom shall become the abode of wild beasts, "But the hawk and the hedgehog shall possess it; the owl and the raven shall live in it. . . . There shall the owl nest and lay and hatch and brood in its shadow; there too the buzzards shall gather, each one with its mate" (34:11, 15); the prophet promises that even the road leading back to Israel will be free of wild animals: "No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there" (35:9).

The prophet predicts that the fruitful, lush land of Edom will become parched and infertile: "Thorns shall grow over its strongholds, nettles and thistles in its fortresses. It shall be the haunt of jackals, an abode for ostriches. Wildcats shall meet with hyenas, goat-demons shall call to each other; there too Lilith shall repose, and find a place to rest" (34:13–14); while the Carmel and the Sharon will blossom: "The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon" (35:1–2). Even the path the redeemed will follow back to their land will be transformed from wilderness to a place flowing with water: "then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water" (35:6–7).

Isaiah declares that Edom is being punished for the harm they have inflicted upon Zion: "For the Lord has a day of vengeance, a year of vindication by Zion's cause" (35:8). This is paraphrased in 35:4, with emphasis on Israel's redemption being the result of God's vengeance on their enemies: "Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you" (35:4).

4. See also Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah*, 450; W. A. M. Beuken, *Isaiah*, part 2: *Isaiah Chapters 28–39*, Historical Commentary on the Old Testament (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 283; Pope demonstrates the connections between chs. 34 and 40–66, and chs. 35 and 40–66. This led him to conclude that the two chapters, 34 and 35, are connected. See M. Pope, "Isaiah 34 in Relation to Isaiah 35–40–66," *JBL* 71 (1952): 235–43.

These striking parallels prove that the two chapters are connected, and that Edom's destruction is a necessary prelude to Israel's redemption; they are two sides of the same coin. This connection explains and justifies the oracle against Edom's placement well outside the series of prophecies against the nations; and its function within Isaiah's prophecies of Israel's redemption.

The Prophecy's Dating and Context

The prophecy's dating is subject to scholarly debate; nor is it clear what events to which the prophecy refers. One opinion, prevalent among medieval Jewish scholars, is that the prophecy speaks of the distant future, of the fate that will befall Rome and Christianity, who were referred to as Edom in that period.[5] Some modern scholars also hold that Isa 34 is eschatological, referring not to the actual nation of Edom who dwelled southeast of Judah, but rather expressing the nation's yearning to see their enemies punished in the future.[6] First, however, the Jewish medieval notion that Edom serves as a euphemism for Rome or Christianity strays considerably from the plain meaning of the text.[7] It is difficult to accept that Isaiah would use the name Edom, a nation all too familiar to his audience, in order to refer to an entity his contemporaries could not understand, given that Rome did not yet exist. This is even more problematic given that the prophecy is explicitly addressed to his listeners: "Draw near, O nations, to hear; O peoples, give heed!" (34:1). If Isaiah's reassurance in ch. 35, "Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, 'Be strong, do not fear!'" refers to the destruction of Rome, how can his words possibly encourage the listeners of his own time? Moreover, it is difficult to conceive that this is the prophecy's main message, as there is no reason that the prophet's own generation would assume that the name of a familiar entity in fact refers to something else. Indeed, Rashi, R. Joseph Cara, and Ibn Ezra all read "Edom" as the actual nation of Edom.

R. Moses Cohen (mentioned in Ibn Ezra's commentary) and R. Joseph Ibn Caspi dated this prophecy to Assyria's time. This is also Kissane's interpretation, although he claims that the oracle is directed toward Assyria rather than Edom.[8] Those who hold that Isaiah castigates Edom for deeds

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5. This is the opinion of Radak on v. 1 and R. Isaiah di Trani on v. 1; in the same vein, Abravanel responded aggressively toward R. Moses HaCohen's interpretation, passionately claiming that the prophecies against Edom relate to the Roman Empire and Christianity. See his book *Announcing Salvation (Mashmia Yeshua)*, 425–27.

6. D. B. Duhm, *Israels Propheten* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1922), 429–30; C. C. Torrey, *The Second Isaiah: A New Interpretation* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1929), 279; Kaiser claims that the prophecy is eschatological, but nonetheless relates to Edom or Idumea. See O. Kaiser, *Isaiah 13–39*: A Commentary, trans. R. A. Wilson, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 353–54.

7. R. Joseph Ibn Caspi attacked this direction in his commentary on 34:1.

8. E. J. Kissane, *The Book of Isaiah, vol. I (I–XXXIX)* (Dublin: Browne & Nolan, 1960), 369.

of his own time explain that the Edomites participated in Sanheriv's campaign against Judah, and are therefore subjected to the prophet's reproach.[9] However, there is no evidence of notable conflict between Edom and Judah during the eighth century B.C.E. Edom is even absent from Isaiah's series of prophecies against the nations in chs. 13–23.

The most likely option, therefore, is that the prophecy relates to the Edomite brutality against Judah during Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of the temple in 586 B.C.E. This interpretation was proposed by R. Eliezer of Beaugency, as well as many modern scholars.[10]

The only phrase that contributes to the oracle's referent can be found in v. 8: "For the Lord has a day of vengeance, a year of vindication by Zion's cause." This vengeance apparently refers to the battle over Zion in 586 B.C.E. This cannot be related to the attack on Judah in the eighth century because the malicious intentions against Jerusalem were never realized, as Isaiah anticipated; the Assyrian army failed to conquer Jerusalem. It is therefore problematic to ascribe "vengeance" or "vindication" to the Assyrian (let alone Edomite) infractions against Jerusalem.

As discussed, ch. 35 should be read as a continuation of ch. 34. Many other historical allusions in ch. 35 also negate the possibility that these events refer to Isaiah's own time. Chapter 35 refers to the Judean return to Zion from the Babylonian exile: "but the redeemed shall walk there. And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (35:9–10). This verse also appears verbatim in Isa 51:10–11.

Chapter 35 also mentions vengeance against the nations, which is less compatible with the events of the eighth century: "Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you" (v. 4). The concept of returning to Zion and avenging their enemies is in more appropriate dialogue with the Judeans' exile to Babylon in 586 B.C.E. It is also easier to understand the prophecy against Edom in ch. 34 in this context, given their participation in Jerusalem's destruction.[11]

The style and central motifs of the prophecies also feature prominently in other chapters in Isaiah, notably chs. 40–66, which clearly refer to the Babylonian exile and the return to Zion.[12] The consolation prophet's audi-

9. A. Hacham, *Isaiah*, Da'at Miqra (Jerusalem: HaRav Kook, 1984) 365 [Hebrew].

10. In his commentary on v. 5: "Against Edom: that they rejoiced at the destruction of My people, and when the destruction of its refugees was at stake, they betrayed them to the enemy during the time of crisis (see Obad 13–14)." See also A. Dillmann, *Der Prophet Jesaia,* KHAT 5 (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1890), 301; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah*, *450*; Childs, *Isaiah*, 253; Watts, *Isaiah 34–66*, 511.

11. As most exegetes hold. See, for example, Hacham, *Isaiah,* 1:365.

12. See also R. B. Y. Scott, "The Relation of Isaiah, Chapter 35, to Deutro-Isaiah," *AJSL* 52 (1935–36): 178–91.

ence in chs. 40–66 is engulfed in their misery, blind and deaf to their promised deliverance, unaware of God's future salvation and their restoration to the land. Repeatedly, he urges them to awaken and be comforted: "to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness" (42:7). "Bring forth the people who are blind, yet have eyes, who are deaf, yet have ears!" (43:8). Similarly, the prophet declares in 35:5: "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped."

Several times in his consolation prophecies, Deutero-Isaiah expresses God's omnipotence through the motif of changing wilderness to water, or water to wilderness. This motif is employed for two purposes: first, in order to encourage the people to leave their place of exile and return to the land, promising that God will protect them and provide for them along the way and, second, as an expression of God's might. This is designed to challenge the people's fear that after their exile, God no longer has the power to save them. To this end, the prophet repeatedly emphasizes God's power over nature. One such example can be found in Isa 41:17–19:

> When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue is parched with thirst, I the Lord will answer them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers on the bare heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. I will put in the wilderness the cedar, the acacia, the myrtle, and the olive; I will set in the desert the cypress, the plane and the pine together.

A similar motif is employed in Isa 43:19–20:

> I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. The wild animals will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches; for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to My chosen people.

Isaiah 50:2 emphasizes God's power in response to the people's doubts, which prevented them from answering the call to return to Israel from exile:

> Why was no one there when I came? Why did no one answer when I called? Is My hand shortened, that it cannot redeem? Or have I no power to deliver? By My rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a desert; their fish stink for lack of water, and die of thirst.

The notion that God is capable of rendering a desert into a place of abundance, or fertile soil into wasteland, also appears in Isa 35:6–7: "For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water."

Isaiah 42:15–16 fuses the motifs of blindness and God's power over natural water sources:

> I will lay waste mountains and hills, and dry up all their herbage; I will turn the rivers into islands, and dry up the pools. I will lead the blind by a road they do not know, by paths they have not known I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These are the things I will do, and I will not forsake them.

This passage is in clear dialogue with 49:9–10, which also describes the exiles' journey home and God's provision for them on their way:

> Saying to the prisoners, "Come out," to those who are in darkness, "Show yourselves." They shall feed along the ways, on all the bare heights shall be their pasture; they shall not hunger or thirst, neither scorching wind nor sun shall strike them down, for He who has pity on them will lead them, and by springs of water will guide them.

Isaiah employs the motif of divine aid during the difficult journey home several times: 42:16, 43:16: "Thus says the Lord, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters"; 49:9–11, 51:10: "Was it not You who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep; who made the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to cross over?"; 57:14: "It shall be said, "Build up, build up, prepare the way, remove every obstruction from My people's way"; 62:10–11: "Go through, go through the gates, prepare the way for the people; build up, build up the highway, clear it of stones, lift up an ensign over the peoples. The Lord has proclaimed to the end of the earth: Say to daughter Zion, 'See, your salvation comes; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him.'" A similar statement is made in Isa 35:8: "A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way; the unclean shall not travel on it, but it shall be for God's people; no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray."

The travelers are referred to as "the redeemed" in chs. 44–60 and 35: "a way for the redeemed to cross over" (51:10). "They shall be called The Holy People, The Redeemed of the Lord" (62:12). So too in 35:9: "the redeemed shall walk there." Moreover, as I mentioned, the same words are found in both 51:11 and 35:9: "And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

Other analogies are present between the later chapters of Isaiah and ch. 35. For example, see table 13. Both passages feature motifs of blindness and God's power to transform the wilderness into a watered place. The next source includes three motifs, mentioning the redeemed and their return to Zion in addition to the latter two concepts (see table 14).

Isa 43:19–20 alludes to both chs. 34 and 35 (table 15). The vast amount of textual connections between chs. 34–35 and 44–60 clearly indicates that the visions in the earlier chapters refer to the people's return to Zion following the destruction and exile of Judah. God's promise of vengeance for Zion's shame; the reference to the return of the redeemed to Zion; and the people's redemption, are all consistent with this background to the proph-

Table 13. Analogies beween Isaiah 35 and 42

Isaiah 35	*Isaiah 42*
5. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; 6. then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; 7. the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; the haunt of jackals shall become a marsh, the grass shall become reeds and rushes.	15. I will lay waste mountains and hills, and dry up all their herbage; I will turn the rivers into islands, and dry up the pools. 16. I will lead the blind by a road they do not know, by paths they have not known I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These are the things I will do, and I will not forsake them . . . 18. Listen, you that are deaf; and you that are blind, look up and see! 19. Who is blind but My servant, or deaf like My messenger whom I send? Who is blind like My dedicated one, or blind like the servant of the LORD? 20. He sees many things, but does not observe them; his ears are open, but he does not hear.

Table 14. The Redeemed and Their Return to Zion

Isaiah 35	*Isaiah 51*
7. The burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; the haunt of jackals shall become a marsh, the grass shall become reeds and rushes. 8. A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way; the unclean shall not travel on it, but it shall be for God's people; no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray. 9. No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there. 10. So the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.	10. Was it not You who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep; who made the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to cross over? 11. So the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

ecy. This theory is supported by the motifs common to these chapters and the series of consolation prophecies in chs. 40–66.

Table 15. Allusions to Isaiah 34–35 in Isaiah 43

Chapter 34	*Chapter 35*	*Chapter 43*
13. Thorns shall grow over its strongholds, nettles and thistles in its fortresses. It shall be the haunt of jackals, an abode for ostriches.	6. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; 7. the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; the haunt of jackals shall become a marsh, the grass shall become reeds and rushes.	19. I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. 20. The wild animals will honor Me, the jackals and the ostriches; for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to My chosen people.

The Unique Attitude toward Edom in Isaiah 34

Who is the addressee in Isa 34? On the one hand, the prophecy explicitly refers to the wrath of God against all the nations, v. 2: "For the Lord is enraged against all the nations, and furious against all their hordes; he has doomed them, has given them over for slaughter." Divine wrath and harsh punishment will be unleashed against all the nations. On the other hand, the prophet also explicitly addresses Edom: "When my sword has drunk its fill in the heavens, lo, it will descend upon Edom, upon the people I have doomed to judgment" (v. 5). How can the reference to all the nations be reconciled with the prophecy's specific warning to Edom?

The oracle's initial universal address, as well as the fact that this chapter is not part of Isaiah's series of prophecies against the nations, has led many to the conclusion that in this chapter, Edom is a symbol of all nations, or the general embodiment of evil.[13] Pope reinforces this typological explanation by comparing this passage to Obadiah and Ezek 25:24. In these sources, he argues, God declares that Edom will be punished through Israel, whereas Isa 34 and 63 state that God will be the agent of Edom's destruction. In these two sources, he therefore deduces, Edom features as a symbol of evil, not in a literal sense.[14]

Another variation of this explanation is that Edom's destruction is a warning and prototype of the fate that will befall all nations in the future. According to this explanation, Edom's destruction here is one manifesta-

13. Torrey, *Second Isaiah*, 279–80; Miscall, *Isaiah*, 8; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah*, 451. Raabe explains that Edom was chosen as a symbol in this prophecy because of the wordplay between the nation Edom and the motif "דם," blood. See Raabe, *Obadiah*, 35. Of course, this explanation cannot equally be applied to every source in which Edom is thought to be a symbol, where there is no wordplay similar to that in Isa 34.

14. Pope, *Isaiah 34*, 243.

tion of God's judgment on the entire world. Oswalt, for example, argues that in vv. 1–4, the prophet addresses the universe, while vv. 5–8 see this declaration implemented on Edom. In vv. 9–17, the punishment described is an example of the grim fate awaiting the nations, rather than a specific end that only Edom will meet.[15]

The claim that Edom features in a symbolic rather than literal sense here is problematic; the text relates explicitly to the land of Edom and to the city Bozrah, which would not be appropriate if Edom were only functioning on a symbolic level.[16] Some do believe that the chapter refers to the actual nation of Edom; in Hacham's opinion, God's fury will be unleashed on all of the nations who wronged Israel, but Edom will pay the worst price of all.[17]

Given that this prophecy relates to the destruction of the temple in 586 B.C.E., as I have shown, Edom appears in the literal sense. Here, their sin is consistent with other sources that mention their role in the Babylonian destruction of Judah. God's vengeance and retribution is a response to Edom's part in Zion's downfall.

Nonetheless, accusation against Edom does not occupy a central place in this prophecy. Unlike Ezek 35 and Obadiah, there is no allusion to Edom's occupation of Judean territory; there is only brief, vague reference to retribution for "Zion's cause." This prophecy should therefore be ascribed to the exilic period, before Edomite settlement of Judah had exacerbated and become a real Judean concern. The salvation of ch. 35 can be understood as the nation's return to Zion, which is contingent on Edom's destruction. This prophecy is thus parallel to Ps 137 and Lam 4, which describe the people's despair at their harsh reality of exile and their misery following Jerusalem's destruction. Consolation is offered in the form of promise that they will return to Zion. The nations' wrath at Edom during the period of exile following the destruction is expressed both in Ps 137, and here in Isa 34–35.[18]

15. Oswalt, *Isaiah,* 2:607–8. And Clements, *Isaiah*, 272; In Beuken's opinion, Edom features as both a symbolic and literal sense here. See Beuken, *Isaiah 28–39*; 285–88. Watts, who claims that the prophecy is addressed to humanity in general, claims that is unlikely that it refers to Edom, as Edom does not play a role in the book of Isaiah, and he therefore emends "Edom" to אדם—humanity—in v. 5. He further claims that "Edom" cannot be read as "humanity" here, because it refers to places, so the prophet uses Edom for its wordplay with אדם. See Watts, *Isaiah*, 518–19. These arbitrary changes are unconvincing. In his opinion, God's vindication is not for Zion's sake and is against Edom, but only against Edom. See ibid., 526–27. Lust claims that the chapter relates to three different addressees: vv. 2–3, 4, and 7 are against the nations, vv. 5–6 are against Edom, and vv. 8–15 are against Zion. See Lust, "Isaiah 34," 279–86.

16. Wildberger, *Isaiah,* 1331–32.

17. Kaiser, *Isaiah*, 353–54; Hacham, *Isaiah,* 1:366.

18. I therefore disagree with Kaiser's opinion that the prophecy reflects a later period, after the return to Zion. This prophecy does not at all reflect territorial issues that do arise in Ezek 35. See Kaiser, *Isaiah*, 353–54.

What differentiates this prophecy about Edom's destruction from other sources, and from Ezek 35–36 in particular, is the fact that Edom's sin only informs the prophecy, but is not described explicitly. The reference to vengeance and a "year of vindication" (34:8) only implies that Edom has sinned. In contrast to the prevalent opinion that sin is only implicit in this passage because Edom functions on a symbolic level, I believe that the reason for the lack of explicit mention of sin is different. Here, more than any other oracle discussed previously in this study, the main theme is not Edom's sin against Israel and ensuing punishment but the fundamental notion that Israel's redemption is necessarily preceded by Edom's destruction. This prophecy focuses on Israel's redemption; Edom's punishment is a preliminary stage of this redemption. Like Ezek 35–36, the prophecy of Edom's downfall is not part of the prophet's series of oracles against the nations but rather is an integral part of the description of Israel's salvation.

Conclusion

Isa 34 foresees Edom's destruction. As opposed to the prevalent opinion that in this chapter, Edom functions as a symbol of evil or of the nations, Isaiah seems to be referring to the actual nation of Edom. First, the passage draws a distinction between Edom and the rest of the nations; second, it refers to Bozrah, a city in the land of Edom, a reference which is only relevant if the prophet is referring to the nation dwelling southeast of Judah.

Like Ezekiel's oracle against Edom in ch. 35, the oracle in Isa 34 is not part of his series of prophecies against the nations (chs. 13–21); likewise, the oracle against Edom is juxtaposed with a vision of Israel's redemption. I established a connection between the chapters based on the inverse relationship between elements of ch. 34 (Edom's destruction) and 35 (Israel's redemption). Through strong thematic and linguistic parallels between this chapter and the Deutero-Isainic material in chs. 40–66, I demonstrated that chs. 34–35 also relate to Israel's redemption following Judah's destruction at the hands of the Babylonians in 586 B.C.E.

What distinguishes this prophecy against Edom from other sources—especially Ezek 35–36—is the lack of focus on Edom's actual sin. The author does not emphasize Edom's misconduct against Israel; rather, the central theme of this passage is the idea that Edom's downfall is a precondition for Israel's redemption. This connection already resonates strongly among the prophet's audience. Once some time has elapsed since the destruction and its dark aftermath, Israel's redemption and Judah's return to its status of chosen son seems to be psychologically linked to Edom's punishment, which apparently hindered Israel's acknowledgement of themselves as a chosen nation undergoing a process of redemption.

Chapter 9

Isaiah's Prophecy against Edom, Chapter 63

Delineating the Prophecy

One of the most challenging issues concerning the texts of Deutero-Isaiah, is the delineation of different prophetic units. Most scholars believe that the prophecy against Edom is an independent unit, consisting of vv. 1–6 in ch. 63,[1] even though scholars have found convincing connections between this prophecy and its adjacent chapters.[2] Lynch presents an *inclusio* spanning Isa 49:15b–63:6.[3] It is, however, problematic to include so much material within a single prophetic unit, despite the connections between the verses. Another suggestion is that the prophecy against Edom marks the end of a prophecy that begins in 62:8 and ends in 63:6.[4] These boundaries are questionable because God's vow to preserve the people's produce in 62:8 is a response to the watchmen's prayers in vv. 6–7.

While determining the prophecies' boundaries is no easy task, it is impossible to assert that the oracle of 63:1–6 stands alone when it clearly and profoundly relates to the preceding prophecies of Israel's redemption, as implied in v. 4: "For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and the year

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1. C. Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*: A Commentary, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1969), 380–81; Paul, *Isaiah,* 2:511 on chs. 49–66. Goldingay is also convinced that this passage stands alone but he does note connections between these verses and others, chiefly 49:16–21 and chs. 60–62. He does not assert whether 63:1–6 is based on these chapters or vice versa. For the first opinion, see B. Gosse, "Detournement de la vengeance du Seigneur contre Edom et les nations en Isa 63:1–6," *ZAW* 102 (1990): 105–10; for the second, see R. N. Whybray, *Isaiah 40–66*, New Century Bible (London: Oliphants, 1975), 226. Holmgren proves that Isa 60–63:6 was composed by a single author: F. Holmgren, "Yahweh the Avenger," in *Rhetorical Criticism: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg*, ed. J. J. Jackson and M. Kessler, Pittsburgh Theological Monograph Series 1 (Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1974), 133–48.

2. Whybray, *Isaiah*, 226; Goldingay, *Isaiah*, 356–57.

3. M. J. Lynch, "Zion's Warrior and the Nations: Isaiah 59:15b–63:6 in Isaiah's Zion Traditions," *CBQ* 70 (2008): 244–63. Others have observed continuity between 59:15–63:6. See, for example, J. L. Kool, *Isaiah*, part 3, vol. 3: *Isaiah Chapters 56–66*, Historical Commentary on the Old Testament (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 329, and his supplementary bibliography. Many have noted the connection between 59:16–21 and 63:1–6, for example, Holmgren, "Yaweh the Avenger," 147–48; Childs, *Isaiah*, 489, 515; Mathews, *Defending Zion,* 80–81.

4. Watts, *Isaiah 34–66*, 886–87.

for my redeeming work had come." Edom's destruction is an inextricable part of Israel's redemption. If so, it is evident that the verses preceding the chapter are its inseparable constituent. Isaiah 63:7 and on is apparently an entirely separate prophecy describing the nation's complaints about their dire situation. The unit therefore concludes in 63:6; the question is where the prophecy begins.

Chapter 60 discusses Judah's redemption and the ingathering of exiles. The nations also play a central part in this passage, but unlike 63:1–6, this oracle affirms that the nations will contribute to Israel's redemption, and even play a positive role. Chapter 60 does not describe any revenge against the nations—only those who refuse to serve Israel will be punished, and this is only briefly mentioned in v. 12. This unit, therefore, seems unrelated to the description that follows it.

Chapter 61, on the other hand, opens with motifs that gradually develop until 63:6. The chapter begins with the prophet's declaration that he has been appointed for two reasons: to bring comfort to the broken-hearted and to announce God's impending vengeance (vv. 1–2):

> The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners;
> To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn.

The prophecy of vengeance on Edom concludes in 63:4 with a similar statement to ch. 61's opening, generating an *inclusio:*

> For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and the year for my redeeming work had come.

This verse concludes the prophetic unit that opens in ch. 61 with a similar statement. Besides this linguistic marker, the content of this unit also creates a chiastic structure. Isaiah 62:2 opens with the theme of redemption: "To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor," and continues with the theme of vengeance: "and the day of vengeance of our God." Isaiah 63:4 contains the same elements in reverse order: "For the day of vengeance was in my heart," followed by "and the year for my redeeming work had come." This allows us to establish the boundaries of the prophetic unit concerning Judah's redemption and revenge against the nations, and Edom in particular, as 61:1–63:6.

Dating the Prophecy

It is difficult to determine the precise date of composition of this prophecy, which clearly reflects the horrors of the destruction. The prophet is sent to comfort the mourners of Zion (61:3), so the unit necessarily postdates the destruction. As Judah is still destroyed (according to 61:4)—still

forsaken and desolate (62:4)—the oracle can presumably be traced to the period before Zion's restoration. The reference to Jerusalem's walls and the city watchmen presumably pertains to the Judeans who returned to Zion, and are still sunk in the mire of Judah's destruction (62:6). On the other hand, there seems to be allusion to the Judeans on their way to Zion (62:10–12). Although it is hard to pinpoint the time of the prophecy, it clearly takes place after Cyrus's declaration, when Judah and Jerusalem were still in a sorry state, and there was still anticipation of the Judean exiles' return from Babylon. We already encountered these historical circumstances in Ezek 35 and Isa 34; circumstances which illuminate the Judean hostility toward Edom. As we will see, this prophecy is apparently dated several years later than ch. 34, as the consolation prophecy in 62—the antithesis of Edom's destruction in 63—does not focus upon the Return to Zion, like ch. 35, but on the land and Jerusalem's redemption (62:1) and the rebuilding of the land (61:4). Even though these verses can be dated to the period after the destruction, and presumably after the Return to Zion, there is no mention of Edomite colonization of Judean territory.

The Identity of Edom

Once again, many scholars claim that Edom features as a symbol of all the nations, or as an embodiment of evil.[5] This prophecy shares several characteristics with ch. 34, as I will show below. We saw that despite the fact that the prophecy opens by addressing "all the nations," it then relates specifically to Edom; the same is true here, in ch. 63. Although the prophet addresses all of the nations, "I trampled down peoples in my anger" (63:6), he focuses on Edom and their punishment and merely extends this punishment to other peoples. Scholars have proposed more explanations for the selection of Edom as a symbol in this prophecy than for any other source. One suggestion is that other sources convey that God arrives from Edom (Deut 33:2; Judg 5:4; Hab 3:2), and this prophecy describes God's arrival.[6] Another explanation is that because the motif of blood is central in this prophecy, the name Edom, which recalls blood and the color red, is an appropriate symbol. Similarly, the Edomite city Bozrah, בצרה, plays on the word בציר, meaning grape harvest.[7] There is certainly wordplay between

5. Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*, 384; Whybray, *Isaiah*, 253; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56–66*, 249. Many scholars, convinced that Edom functions as a symbol of all the nations in this source, also emphasize the unrealistic nature of the description, particularly because all the nations are defeated in one battle, and therefore they conclude that the prophecy is apocalyptic. See, for example, Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*, 384. Blenkinsopp already explains that there is no reason to think that the prophecy is describing a single battle. See Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40–66*, 249. Furthermore, because we have adopted the approach that Edom here refers to the actual nation of Edom, there are no real grounds to think that the prophecy is apocalyptic. Childs also objects to this reading, *Isaiah*, 515.

6. Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 55–66*, 249.

7. Raabe, *Obadiah*, 36.

these names and the color of the blood-soaked garments of the warrior,[8] but it is more likely that the prophet spoke of Edom and used this wordplay to illustrate the magnitude of the slaughter in Edom, rather than assign the name to this bloody scene merely in order to elicit wordplay. Similarly, the idea of God arriving from Edom is employed because the passage focuses on Edom in the first place, and not vice versa. Once again, Isaiah's prophecy, like other sources discussed until now, apparently refers to the nation of Edom in a literal, rather than figurative, sense.[9] The reference to Bozrah, Edom's capital, necessitates this reading.[10]

The Meaning of the Prophecy

As we saw in Isa 34–35, and Ezek 35–36, Edom's destruction in Isa 63:1–6 mirrors a prophecy of Israel's redemption (61:1–62:12).[11]

The prophecy begins with the reason for the prophet's appointment (61:1–3):

> The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners;
> To proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn;
> To provide for those who mourn in Zion—
> to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to display his glory.

The prophet is appointed to mend the hearts of the broken people; to bring tidings of the release of the captives and exiles; to transform the misery of Zion's mourners to joy and gladness. Redemption will be manifested in both a positive and a negative sense: through Israel's salvation, and through vengeance on their enemies. This dichotomy is already established with the prophecy's objectives, which are to comfort the mourners through declaration of "the year of the LORD's *favor*, and the day of *vengeance* of our God."

The prophecy following this introduction can be divided into two sections: 61:4–62:17 describes "the year of the Lord's favor," Israel's redemption; while 63:1–6 relates "the day of vengeance of our God," the punishment that will befall the enemy. This introduction is echoed in the prophecy's conclusion (63:4).

8. L. Alonso Schökel, *A Manual of Hebrew Poetics*, trans. A. Graffy, Subsidia Biblica 11 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1988), 30.

9. Goldingay, *Isaiah,* 360–61.

10. Some scholars who assumed that the prophecy refers to Edom as a symbol of the nations proposed different ways of emending the text. See Duhm, *Jesaia*, 433, whose proposal was not accepted in research.

11. Mathews, *Defending Zion*, 81.

Other linguistic and thematic connections link the prophecies of salvation and punishment. God is described as the executor of both deliverance and vengeance. Isa 62:11 describes God's arrival in Zion:

> The LORD has proclaimed to the end of the earth:
> Say to daughter Zion, "*See, your salvation comes*;
> his reward is with him, and his recompense before him."

Divine vengeance on Edom is also manifested through the representation of God. This description is more vivid: God arrives as a warrior returning from the battlefield, his garments soaked in blood: "*Who is this* that comes from Edom, from Bozrah in garments stained crimson?"

Both prophecies employ the motif of clothing. In 61:10, the prophet declares: "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being shall exult in my God; for *he has clothed me with the garments* of salvation, *he has covered me with the robe* of righteousness, as a *bridegroom decks himself with a garland*, and *as a bride adorns herself* with her jewels."

The speaker of these verses is the nation describing its own salvation using imagery of clothing; the glorious garments symbolize salvation. In contrast, the description of vengeance in 63:1–3 is depicted through the crimson-stained garments of a warrior, which testifies to the blood spilled in revenge:

> Who is this that comes from Edom, from Bozrah in *garments stained crimson*?
> Who is this *so splendidly robed*, marching in his great might?
> "It is I, announcing vindication, mighty to save."
> "Why are *your robes* red, and *your garments* like theirs who tread the wine press?"
> "I have trodden the wine press alone, and from the peoples no one was with Me; I trod them in My anger and trampled them in My wrath;
> their juice spattered *on My garments, and stained all My robes*.

Another common motif is the word צדקה, righteousness, which appears in both prophecies:

> I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my whole being shall exult in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of *righteousness*, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord GOD will cause *righteousness* and praise to spring up before all the nations. (61:10–11)

> For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her *righteousness* shines out like the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch.
> The nations shall see your *righteousness*, and all the kings your glory;
> and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will give. (62:1–2)

Surprisingly, this word also appears in the prophecy of vengeance against Edom:

> "Who is this that comes from Edom, from Bozrah in garments stained crimson?
> Who is this so splendidly robed, marching in His great might?"
> "It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save." (63:1)

The phrase "speaking in righteousness" means that the acts against Edom God is about to describe are virtuous acts of truth, integrity, and loyalty.[12] The choice of this particular word in this context creates a parallel between God's salvation, which brings righteousness, and God's vengeance, which also generates righteousness.

We have discussed the reason for the juxtaposition of Edom's destruction and Israel's redemption in relation to previous prophecies. Both salvation and vengeance aim "to comfort all who mourn" (61:2). While this brief prophecy does not contain any hints of Edom's rejection, there are several points worth noting. First, God's eternal covenant with the people is explicitly mentioned in the prophet's words of consolation to Israel: "For I the Lord love justice, I hate robbery and wrongdoing; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an *everlasting covenant* with them" (61:8). The promise of an everlasting covenant seems to function as a foil to the people's fear that their covenant with God was broken after the destruction. This promise is similar to Jeremiah's promise in 33:23–26. Isaiah 62:4 emphasizes again that God desires the people and its land: "You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married; for the Lord delights in you, and your land shall be married." The prophet speaks of the people's shameful state and how this humiliation shall be reversed (61:7). Intriguingly, the prophet emphasizes that this reversal will be broadcasted among the nations (61:9). The prophet's juxtaposition of Israel's everlasting covenant with God and Edom's obliteration is suggestive even if Edom's rejection is not explicit, as it is in the prophecy of Malachi. The prophet's emphasis on the renewal of the covenant conveys that this oracle is a reaction to the nation's sense of abandonment and alienation from God. In this context, Edom's annihilation serves as a validation of Israel's covenant.[13]

The prophecy of vengeance on Edom in Isa 63:1–6 shares several connections with the prophecy of Edom's destruction in Isa 34.[14] Both prophecies refer to Edom and Bozrah:

12. Goldingay, *Isaiah 56–66*, 362. For another meaning of the word צדקה, see Watts, *Isaiah*, 673–75, 871, 890.

13. Mathews offers another exegetical direction: that God is destroying Edom as a last "stop" on the way to Zion. See Mathews, *Defending Zion*, 86.

14. Regarding the connection between the two prophecies, see also Raabe, *Obadiah*, 36.

> For the LORD has a sacrifice in *Bozrah*, a great slaughter in the land of *Edom*. (34:6)

In 63:1, the order of the names is reversed:

> Who is this that comes from Edom, from Bozrah in garments stained crimson?

Both prophecies proffer a graphic description of a great slaughter:

> When My sword has drunk its fill in the heavens, lo, it will descend upon Edom, upon the people I have doomed to judgment.
> The LORD has a sword; it is sated with blood, it is gorged with fat,
> with the blood of lambs and goats, with the fat of the kidneys of rams.
> For the LORD has a sacrifice in Bozrah, a great slaughter in the land of Edom.
> Wild oxen shall fall with them, and young steers with the mighty bulls.
> Their land shall be soaked with blood, and their soil made rich with fat. (34:5–7)

> "Why are your robes red, and your garments like theirs who tread the wine press?"
> "I have trodden the wine press alone, and from the peoples no one was with Me; I trod them in My anger and trampled them in My wrath; their juice spattered on My garments, and stained all My robes." (63:2–3)

Both prophecies speak of Israel's redemption and vengeance on Edom, using similar language:

> *For the* LORD *has a day of vengeance*, a *year of vindication* by Zion's cause. (34:8)

> *For the day of vengeance was in My heart*, and *the year for My redeeming work* had come. (63:4)

Chapters 34–35 and 61:1–63:6 are closely related. Both units are composed of a prophecy of Israel's redemption and a prophecy of Edom's destruction, and the connections between each section indicate that Edom's destruction is the flipside of Israel's redemption; the latter is dependent on the former. Both prophecies against Edom place special emphasis on God's vengeance, highlighting divine hostility, and both descriptions are graphic and gory. Both prophecies of redemption are categorically designed to comfort Israel, but while Isa 34–35 seems to be directed at Zion's exiles before their return to the land, 61:1–63:6 is addressed to Judeans who have already returned to their homeland and are desolate at its ruined state. While the main solace of ch. 35 is the promise of their return to Zion (35:10), the later prophecy focuses on the impending redemption of the land and Jerusalem, and the country's restoration (61:4).

We have already seen that Edom's punishment in Isa 34, as well as Ezek 35, is executed by God, and the same is true in Obadiah. This is also the case in Isa 63. What distinguishes this prophecy from its counterparts

is the graphic, detailed quality of its description of God as a warrior returning triumphant from the battlefields of Edom, awash in enemy blood. This personification is not usually found in prophecies of punishment in general, and is all the rarer in oracles of doom against the nations. Here, Edom is depicted as God's direct enemy in unprecedented graphic gore. God's hatred of Edom, Israel's selection and Edom's rejection, will also be stated explicitly in the book of Malachi.

The prophecy's opening reconfigures a significant motif. Isaiah 63:10 describes God coming from Edom. This concept of God appears also in Moses' blessing in Deut 33:2; Judg 5:4; and Hab 3:3. However, as we saw before, these sources are an indication of God's closeness to Edom, and may even explain the fraternal attitude toward them. Here, the motif is inverted—God's arrival from Edom, which is usually an expression of affinity, becomes an expression of hatred and destruction.[15]

The connection between Isa 63 and these sources is even more profound. Moses describes God's arrival from Edom with images of fire and sunrise ("he dawned . . . and shone forth," 33:2). God's arrival is also characterized by light in Habakkuk ("the brightness was like the sun," 3:4). In Isa 63, the blaze of light of God's revelation is replaced with the fiery red of blood. The description of God's appearance in Judg 5:4–5 causes the earth to tremble; the skies to melt, and the clouds to burst into flowing water; even the mountains melt and trickle ("the earth trembled, and the heavens poured, the clouds indeed poured water. The mountains quaked before the Lord"). When God arrives from Edom in Isa 63, the liquid that flows freely is not water but blood ("their juice spattered [ויז] on my garments"; there is a clear connection between the root נזה, spattered, and נזל, flowed).

The employment of similar but distorted motifs emphasizes how God's connection to Edom is rendered into harsh vengeance. This rhetoric conveys to Judah that the potential closeness between God and Edom expressed in Deuteronomy, Judges, and Habakkuk does not lead to a covenant between them. On the contrary, the motifs associated with God's arrival from Edom become motifs of death and destruction in Isaiah.

This prophecy emphasizes God's vengeance against Edom, which is reinforced through the prophecy's structure and rhetoric (63:1–6):[16]

"Who is this that comes from Edom, from Bozrah in garments stained crimson?
Who is this so splendidly robed, marching in His great might?"
"It is I, announcing vindication, mighty to save."
"Why are Your robes red, and Your garments like theirs who tread the wine press?"

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15. Scholars have noted the connection between this verse and earlier sources. For example, R. J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament*, Harvard Semitic Monographs 4 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 119 n. 23.

16. Holmgren proposes a chiastic structure of the prophecy, see Holmgren, "Yahweh the Avenger," 133–48.

"I have trodden the wine press alone, and from the peoples no one was with Me;
I trod them in My anger and trampled them in My wrath;
their lifeblood spattered on My garments, and stained all My robes.
For the day of vengeance was in My heart, and the year for My redeeming work had come.
I looked, but there was no helper; I stared, but there was no one to sustain Me;
so My own arm brought me victory, and My wrath sustained me.
I trampled down peoples in My anger, I crushed them in My wrath,
and I poured out their lifeblood on the earth."

Two questions, each followed by an answer, divide this prophecy into two sections. The first question is "Who is this that comes," a dramatic expression that arouses curiosity, similar to expressions found in Song 6:10; 8:5; and Jer 46:7. An anonymous speaker describes the figure as "splendidly robed, marching in his great might." Only afterwards is the speaker identified as God: "It is I, announcing vindication, mighty to save." Interestingly enough, God's identity is established in relation to Israel's salvation rather than through vengeance, which is the passage's main topic. This illustrates that the main purpose of God's action is not to destroy Edom, but to avenge Israel. The rest of the prophecy, however, focuses on this revenge.

The speaker then asks a second question. While the first was indefinite, "Who is it," the speaker now addresses God in the second person: "Why are Your robes red, and Your garments like those who tread the wine press?" God answers this question in detail, explaining that the garments are stained red with the blood that spattered them during the massacring of Edom. Verse 3 echoes the question and answers it in graphic detail:

Question: Why are Your robes red, and Your garments like those who tread the wine press?

Answer: I trod them in My anger and trampled them in My wrath;
their juice spattered on My garments, and stained all My robes.

These verses focus on God's stained garments as a symbol of divine vengeance, highlighting the principle that God is the one who wreaks vengeance on Edom. This is the idea behind the prophecy's general rhetorical form, which is already implied in the prophecy's opening question and answer: "Who is it?" "God." Indeed, God is the main speaker in this passage; the image of God as a warrior returning from the battlefield features elsewhere in the Bible, but the image presented in this chapter is the most graphic, the most vivid.

God's answer is seven lines long. The first three (v. 3) are parallel to the final three (vv. 5–6). These verses tremble with the motif of anger. The absence of any aid from other nations is also emphasized: God, and God alone, takes revenge on Edom. Verse 4 is situated in between these verses, explaining the central purpose of God's actions: "For the day of vengeance

was in My heart, and the year for My redeeming work had come." God's objective is to punish Edom, and redeem Israel. This verse doubly emphasizes the divine agenda against Edom, "vengeance was in My heart," as well as the fact that Israel belongs to God: "*My* redeeming work."

This prophecy thus portrays Edom as God's enemy, highlighting the fact that God wreaks vengeance on Edom for the sake of Israel's salvation. This language and imagery conveys that God is on Israel's side, against Edom.

Conclusion

The prophecy of Edom's destruction in 63:1–6 is closely connected to the prophecy of Israel's redemption in 61:1–62:12. Like the twin prophecies of Ezek 35–36 and Isa 34–35, this oracle of Edom's destruction also serves as an inversion of Israel's redemption. There are also linguistic and thematic parallels between Isa 61:1–63:6 and 34–35.

The most striking aspect of this prophecy is Edom's characterization as the enemy of God, who is the executioner of Edom's punishment. The rhetorical features, structure, and motifs of this unit are designed to portray Edom as God's enemy. The vivid depiction of God's intervention was calculated to reassure Judah that Edom was an unsuitable candidate to replace Israel: Edom was not only their enemy, but God's. At the same time, the prophecy emphasizes that Israel belongs to God, and that these divine acts of vengeance are executed for the sake of their salvation.

This prophecy is dated after the prophetic unit of Isa 34–35, which promises that Israel will return to Zion; 62:1–63:6 describes a more advanced stage of Israel's redemption and refers to the rehabilitation of the land and Jerusalem. This may imply that the Edomite problem persisted after the exiles had returned home, and was likely related to their colonization of Judean territory, as mentioned in Ezek 35.

Chapter 10

Obadiah's Prophecy against Edom

Introduction

I refer to Obadiah as a book, as the works of other minor prophets are categorized, even though there is no real justification in calling 21 verses a "book." This work is the shortest in the biblical canon. Obadiah's prophecy deals exclusively with the subject of Edom's destruction. While the length of the prophecy is not unusual, the fact that the sole focus of Obadiah's only extant oracle is the downfall of Edom suffices to justify a study of the biblical attitude toward Edom in itself. These 21 verses are the most striking example of the sheer hostility toward Israel's brother, and the fact that this is the prophet's exclusive subject only serves to exacerbate their acerbity.

Despite its brevity, the book presents many problems.[1] It is unclear precisely when Obadiah prophesied, and it is similarly difficult to determine whether the oracle comprises several prophetic units, or just one. The first, necessary step toward reaching a fruitful discussion of Obadiah's words is to provide answers to these questions.

Unity or Multiple Prophecies in Obadiah

One of the central issues surrounding this book concerns its cohesion and structure. Some argue that the book contains several different prophecies against Edom; others view it as a cohesive work, authored by one hand at one time.

The latter opinion is often supported by the argument that the book is conceptually cohesive, centering on one main theme. Allen claims that like the book of Lamentations, Obadiah also perceived the destruction as a manifestation of God's wrath on "the day of the Lord," but a remnant of Israel survived in deference to their entitlement to the capital city and the land. The nations who attacked Jerusalem, on the other hand, were doomed to face retribution. He claims that this theme is gradually developed throughout the book: opening with Edom's downfall, the narrative then describes Edom's crimes on the day of the Lord; the scope then widens

1. As Mason eloquently states in Jerome's wake: "Its difficulty is in inverse proportion to its length." R. A. Mason, *Micah, Nahum, Obadiah*, OTG (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 87.

to portray the fall of the nations and the rehabilitation of God's chosen people. Even while describing what will befall the other nations, the second half of the prophecy retains focus on Edom's destruction.[2]

Some scholars present the book's general structure as proof of its cohesion, emphasizing the envelope structure that encompasses all 21 verses. The reversal of Israel's dire situation at the end of the prophecy, as reflected through God's might and majesty in v. 21, is the practical expression of God's declaration in v. 1.[3] Cogan also stresses the connection between v. 1 and v. 21, claiming that the entire work revolves around one central theme, beginning with declaration of war on Edom (v. 1) and concluding with the image of judgement meted out at Mound Esau (v. 21).[4] Cogan reinforces this theory by pointing out the concatenation of many verses throughout the book, creating a terrace structure wherein two consecutive verses share a common word.[5] Snyman attempts to prove that the book was deliberately redacted to accord with its overall chiastic structure; while he admits to a certain lack of cohesion, he emphasizes the general pattern of the final product.[6] In his comprehensive commentary on Obadiah, Renkema downplays the importance of the differences between various segments of the prophecy.[7] Raabe demonstrates the affinity between the different sections of the book through repetitive words and concepts.[8] Jenson has recently asserted that the book should be read as a unified whole.[9]

Some of these arguments for the book's unity, however, are unconvincing. Not all of the prophecy's verses follow Cogan's proposed terrace pattern, and some of the words that supposedly create this structure are very common. Even the connection between the first and last verses is quite general. Moreover, the contention that the book should be read in its current form is not credible in this case. This is a cogent assertion in cases where the text obviously functions as a single coherent unit—for example, when the narrative follows a clearly defined plot whose final form, rather than the process of its formation, can constitute the subject of scholarly scrutiny. In our case, however, there is no preliminary information that allows us to determine whether the text comprises a single prophecy or a collection of prophecies. It is therefore impossible to put the question of the book's composition aside and relate solely to its final form.

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2. L. C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 135.

3. Allen, *Joel*, 135–36; J. Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*: *A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 118.

4. Cogan, *Obadiah*, 4.

5. Ibid., 5.

6. S. D. Snyman, "Cohesion in the Book of Obadiah," *ZAW* 101 (1989): 59–71.

7. Renkema, *Obadiah*, 38.

8. Raabe, *Obadiah*, 18–19.

9. P. P. Jenson, *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah: A Theological Commentary*, LHBOTS 496 (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2008), 6.

Counter to the first approach, others are convinced that the book comprises more than one prophetic unit.[10] A bipartite division of Obadiah is widely endorsed by research: vv. 1–14 + v. 15b constituting the first segment, and vv. 15a + vv. 16–21 the second. The first unit manifests a concrete historical background while the second is eschatological.[11] This division is supported by the significant differences between the units. In the first (vv. 1–14 + v. 15b), Edom is usually addressed in second person; in the second (vv. 15a + vv. 16–21), Edom is exclusively referred to in third person, along with all the nations, while the second person is reserved for Judah (v. 16). The most significant difference between the two oracles is that the nations execute God's judgment on Edom in the first half; while in the second, on the "day of the Lord," the nations are also punished together with Edom, and Israel is the agent of God's wrath on them. Moreover, the first oracle's portrayal of retribution against Edom lacks any mention of Judah, while in the second, Israel's redemption is the flipside of the coin of Edom's destruction on "the day of the Lord." This distinction also applies to the two halves of v. 15: the first discusses judgment against all nations, as do vv. 16–21, while the second addresses Edom in second person, corresponding to vv. 1–14.[12]

Obadiah's Different Sections according to their Historical Background

Despite the flaws in the various arguments for Obadiah's unity, the general cohesion of the work cannot be dismissed. Evidently, in its present form, the book was designed to be read sequentially as it lacks beginning or concluding formulas. On the other hand, even if we do accept some of the arguments advocating the book's unity, the significant discrepancies between the two halves of the book are too significant to refute the claim of the chapter's composite nature. It is difficult to fathom how in one unit of prophecy the nations serve as God's emissaries executing judgment against Edom, while in the same prophecy Edom stands accused alongside the other nations. Israel's active role against the nations in the second half

10. Watts, for example, claimed that the book is a collection of five prophecies. Watts, *Obadiah*, 20–21. These theories were not accepted in research.

11. J. Wellhausen, *Die kleinen Propheten: Übersetzt und Erklät* (Berlin: Reimer, 1898), 213–14; D. K. Marti, *Das Dodekapropheton* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1904), 228; Bewer, *Obadiah and Joel*, 3–4; W. Rudolph, *Joel—Amos—Obadja—Jona*, KAT 13/2 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 1971), 295–96; Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah*, 21–22; Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 118.

12. Wellhausen, *Die kleinen Propheten*, 213; Marti, *Das Dodekapropheton*, 237. These differences caused most scholars who accept this division to conclude that these prophecies were not composed by a single author. On the other hand, Rudolph and Weiser, who accept this division, argue that there is no reason to believe that the prophecy was composed by more than one author (even though they believe that vv. 19–22 were not composed by him). Rudolph, *Joel—Amos—Obadja—Jona*, 296; A. Weiser, *Introduction to the Old Testament,* trans. D. M. Barton (London: Darton, 1961), 248.

is also inconsistent with their utter passivity in the first. In this respect, I concur with the distinction drawn between v. 15a + vv. 16–21 and vv. 1–14 + v. 15b[13]; moreover, I accept the claim that the first half of v. 15 refers to the day of God's judgment on the nations and therefore belongs to the second half of the book, while the second half of v. 15 addresses Edom in the second person and therefore appertains to vv. 1–14.[14]

Some of the scholars who favor the book's division claim that the material can be ascribed to different authors. Many disassociate vv. 19–21 from v. 15a + vv. 16–18, chiefly because they are written in prose, while the rest of the chapter is in poetic form.[15] Furthermore, Rudolph and Wolff argue that v. 20 implies that there is already a wide diaspora, which in their view is incompatible with the foregoing verses' eyewitness account of the destruction. Allen, however, is correct that Obadiah's witnessing of the fall of Jerusalem does not necessarily obviate his observation of the Jews' dispersal in exile at the end of the sixth century.[16] The differentiation between poetry and prose is also an insufficient reason to ascribe the verses to different authors; contrary to this overworked assertion, there is no reason to believe that an author is incapable of working with more than one textual medium.[17]

While I am not convinced that v. 15b + vv. 16–21 should be divided into separate units, I do accept Sellin's division of vv. 1–14 + v. 15b into two prophecies. He views Jerusalem's destruction in 586 B.C.E. as the historical backdrop to vv. 10–14 and v. 15b, while vv. 1–9, which are parallel to the verses in Jer 49, predate the destruction.[18] It is improbable that vv. 1–9 were composed after 586 B.C.E., as they criticize Edom solely for its arrogance, with no mention of its actual offenses against Judah.[19] This claim also per-

13. Although this is not due to Wellhausen's explanation that the first part is historical and the second eschatological; rather, I accept Thompson's explanation that the prophets combine these two different elements. J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Obadiah*, IB 6 (New York: Abingdon, 1956), 859. In my opinion, the final part of Obadiah is not eschatological.

14. Wellhausen, *Die kleinen Propheten*, 213; Bewer, *Obadiah and Joel*, 3–4. In contrast, other scholars do not hold that the difference between these parts is significant. See Raabe, *Obadiah*, 200–201; Ben-Zvi, *Obadiah*, 170–75; Renkema, *Obadiah*, 185.

15. Bewer, *Obadiah and Joel*, 16; Rudolph, *Joel—Amos—Obadja—Jona*, 296. According to Rudolph, only vv. 19–20 are a later addition, while v. 21 was the original ending of the book. See Wolff, *Obadiah and Jonah*, 22.

16. Allen, *Joel*, 135.

17. It should be noted that even though vv. 19–21 can be characterized as prose, they have lyrical rhythm. As Thompson notes, it is not easy to differentiate between poetry and prose in the book of Jeremiah, and narrative portions should be classified as high prose. See Thompson, *Jeremiah*, 46. A similar claim is made by H. Weippert, *Die Prosareden des Jeremiabuches*, BZAW 132 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1973), 228–34.

18. D. E. Sellin, *Das Zwölfprophetenbuch*, KAT 12/1 (Leipzig: Deichertsche, 1929), 274–77.

19. In Wellhausen's wake, many scholars are convinced that vv. 1–9 can be dated to the 5th century B.C.E., reflecting the Nabataean invasion of Edom. See Wellhausen, *Die kleinen Propheten*, 214. According to this opinion, this prophecy reflects historical reality. Others believe that the verses are a prediction for the future. See, for example, O. Eissfeldt,

tains to Jer 49. I therefore concur with those who hold that vv. 1–9, like their Jeremian counterpart, reflect the Preexilic Period, when the Edomites were not yet guilty of their crimes of 586 B.C.E.[20]

In light of the above, following the superscription "the vision of Obadiah" (v. 1), the work's verses can be divided into three separate prophecies: vv. 1–9; vv. 10–14 + v. 15b; and v. 15a + vv. 16–22.[21] Each prophecy reflects a different point in time; while all three are proximate, each historical situation is drastically different. Verses 1–9 reflect the period before the destruction, toward the end of the sixth century B.C.E. Verses 10–14 + v. 15b reflect the events of the destruction itself, during 586 B.C.E., and were presumably written during or shortly after this period. Verses 15a + vv. 16–21 were apparently composed soon after, once Judah's neighbors had already begun appropriating the exiles' territory and express the hope of restoration to their land. This oracle was apparently recorded in the Postexilic Period, following the repatriation of Jews to Judah in the wake of the Edict of Cyrus. These Jews were distraught over the foreign encroachment into lands that were Judean before the destruction.[22]

Beyond the historical claims that inform this division, I wish to reinforce this tripartite structure based on each prophecy's content. Obadiah's subject is Edom's crime and punishment, and each section accuses them of a different offense.

The Three Sins of Edom in the Book of Obadiah

Verses 1–9

In vv. 1–9, Edom is attacked by the nations (vv. 5–9), but the reason for this punishment is obscure. Many scholars argue that Edom's offense in these verses is their complicity in Jerusalem's destruction, which is elaborated in detail in vv. 10–14.[23] It is more reasonable, however, that the opening verses accuse Edom of the sin of hubris, resulting in their humiliation and downfall, following the principle of *lex talionis*.[24] According to the

The Old Testament: An Introduction, trans. P. R. Ackroyd (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 403; Ben-Zvi, *Obadiah,* 69, 228–29.

20. Holladay, *Jeremiah,* 2:378; Hoffman, *Jeremiah*, 2:810; Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37–52*, 333. Carroll explains that the hostility toward Edom in Jer 49 is not as severe as other prophetic sources because it underwent redaction. See Carroll, *Jeremiah*, 802. Thompson believes that the events of the 6th century B.C.E. inform Jer 49.

21. This division is accepted by Sellin, *Das Zwölfprophetenbuch*, 274–77.

22. For a similar approach, see G. Fohrer, "Die Sprüche Obadjas," in *Studia biblica et semitica: Theodoro Cristiano Vriezen qui munere professoris theologiae per XXV annos functus est, ab amicis, collegis, discipulis dedicate* (Wageningen: Veenman & Zonen, 1965), 83. However, he holds that vv. 1–9 can be dated to 850 B.C.E.

23. Rudolph, *Joel—Amos—Obadja—Jona*, 305; Allen, *Joel*, 153; R. L. Troxel, *Prophetic Literature: From Oracles to Books* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 102.

24. Fohrer, "Die Sprüche Obadjas," 86; others are not convinced that hubris is the subject of the prophecy. See, for example, Rudolph, *Joel—Amos—Obadja—Jona*, 306. Allen

text, Edom is arrogant in two senses: first, they take pride in their strength and fortifications, leading them to believe in their own invincibility (v. 3). They also exult in their wisdom (vv. 7b, 8b). The argument that these verses focus solely on Edom's hubris is reinforced by the fact that most of this section is parallel to Jer 49:7–22, where there is no mention of any sin besides Edom's pride in their strength and wisdom.[25] It can therefore be extrapolated that these verses are an independent unit within the book of Obadiah.[26] The prophecy in Jeremiah does not refer to Edom's part in the fall of Jerusalem, and, as mentioned, it predates the destruction, so it is reasonable to assume that the verses in Obadiah reflect the same period. The content of these verses confirms this premise: the main topic is the principle of measure for measure, *lex talionis*. Edom's pride, "Your proud heart" (v. 3a) is to be humbled: "I will surely make you least among the nations; you shall be utterly despised" (v. 2). While Edom is convinced of its own invincibility, "You say in your heart, 'Who will bring me down to the ground?'" (v. 3), the prophet declares in God's name that Edom will be brought crashing down: "Though you soar aloft like the eagle, though your nest is set among the stars, from there I will bring you down, says the Lord" (v. 4). Edom's confidence in its defenses and invulnerability—"Your proud heart has deceived you, you that live in the clefts of the rock, whose dwelling is in the heights. You say in your heart, 'Who will bring me down to the ground?'" (v. 3)—will be shattered when their allies betray them and topple them from their proud pedestal: "All your allies have deceived you, they have driven you to the border; your confederates have prevailed against you; those who ate your bread have set a trap for you— there is no understanding of it" (v. 7). The prophet uses the word השיאוך/השאיך, "deceived," in both verses to express their arrogance as well as their downfall. According to the principle of *lex talionis*, the sin that the prophet refers to in vv. 1–9 is clearly the sin of hubris.

Other biblical sources accuse nations of hubris. We have already noted that this is Jeremiah's claim against Edom in 49:16, which is parallel to Obad 1–9. In Isa 10, the prophet avows the destruction of Assyria on account of its two sins: its aspirations to destroy Judah, and its pride (Isa 10:12). Assyria is also criticized for its hubris in Ezek 31:3, 10. Other prophets refer to the arrogance of other nations: Moab (Isa 16:6; Jer 48:29), Babylon (Isa 47:8), Tyre (Ezek 28:2), Nineveh (Zeph 2:15), and Belshazzar of Persia (Dan

also believes that the pride that features in the prophecy is not its subject but a description that emphasizes the depths of their fall. Allen, *Joel*, 47 n. 17. On the principle of measure for measure in prophetic literature, see P. D. Miller Jr., *Sin and Judgment in the Prophets: A Stylistic and Theological Analysis*, SBLMS 27 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982); K. Leung Wong, *The Idea of Retribution in the Book of Ezekiel*, VtSup 97 (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

25. McKane, *Jeremiah,* 1230; Hoffman, *Jeremiah*, 810.

26. For different ways of explaining the relationship between the prophecy against Edom in Jer 49:7–22 and Obadiah, see pp. 93–94 and n. 8.

5:23). Nations are sometimes arrogant due to their strength (as in Isa 10:13, for example) or belief in their ability to resist God's might (Isa 10:11; 14:13–14). On occasion, they are heady with their own wisdom, as in the case of Assyria's haughty confrontation of Israel and God in Isa 10:13. Hubris is an affront against the biblical perception of God's supremacy over humanity because mortal pride challenges God's omnipotence.[27]

Edom's Sin in Verses 10–14 and 15b

While Edom's offense in vv. 1–9 is arrogance, the sin portrayed in the second prophetic unit of Obadiah is their complicity in Judah and Jerusalem's destruction in 586 B.C.E. This crime is also described in Ezek 25:12–14; 35:5; Lam 4:22; and Ps 137.[28] The second unit of Obadiah also invokes the principle of measure for measure. One offense mentioned is "You should not have stood at the crossings *to cut off* his fugitives" (v. 14). Using similar language, Obadiah promises that Edom "shall be *cut off* forever" (v. 10). Assuming that v. 15b also belongs to these verses, the conclusion of this segment perfectly encapsulates the 'measure for measure' principle: "As you have done, it shall be done to you; your deeds shall return on your own head." This phrase is irrelevant to the first nine verses of Obadiah, which describe Edom's arrogant state of mind, rather than a palpable infraction against Judah. These two units, therefore, see two different implementations of the principle of measure for measure. In the first section, Edom's hubris is met with humiliation, and in the second, Edom is cut off because they cut off the Judean fugitives' means of escape (v. 14). This particular offense in 586 B.C.E. is also mentioned in other sources, among them Ezek 25:12–14 and 35:5.

Edom's Sin in Verses 15a and 16–21

The third prophetic unit, v. 15a + vv. 16–21, resumes the threat against Edom that begins in the second prophecy (vv. 10–14 + v. 15b), but from a different perspective. All of Israel's enemy nations (vv. 15a, 16, 19b) are accused in addition to Edom (vv. 18, 19a, 21). The extension of culpability to all nations prompts expectation of reprisal, which indeed features in v. 16, invoking the principle of *lex talionis* for the third time: "For as you have drunk on my holy mountain, all the nations around you shall drink; they shall drink and gulp down, and shall be as though they had never been." The charge in the third prophecy, however, is different; here, the prophet chiefly accuses Edom and other nations of appropriating Judean

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27. See Barton, *Joel and Obadiah*, 137–38. This subject was explored extensively by D. E. Gowan, *When Man Becomes God: Humanism and Hybris in the Old Testament,* Pittsburgh Theological Series 6 (Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1975), especially pp. 19–67. See also B. S. Childs, *Isaiah and the Assyrian Crisis*, Studies in Biblical Theology 3 (London: SCM, 1967), 88–89.

28. And similarly in the apocryphal book of 1 Esdras, 4:45: "And you vowed to build the temple, which the Edomites burnt when it was destroyed by the Chaldeans."

land—Edomites in the south, and Philistines along the coast.[29] In addition to these areas, the prophet also adds that Samaria and Gilead will return to Israel's possession—the latter will be reclaimed by Benjamin, although is it unclear whether Moab, Ammon, or a different nation is guilty of seizing the land. Similarly, the text does not mention who has settled in Samaria; according to 2 Kgs 17, the Assyrians relocated exiles from other conquered nations to this region. This is supported by evidence of the development and growth of Samarian provinces from the late Iron Age III and the Achaemenid period.[30] Israel will reconquer their rightful inheritance: "the house of Jacob shall take possession of those who dispossessed them" (v. 17).[31] There are several explicit references to the post-destruction colonization of Judah's land by Edom and other unspecified peoples in Ezek 35:10, 12; 36:5; and Joel 4:2. The reproof in Joel 4:2 may be directed at Philistia, Tyre and Sidon, who are mentioned in 4:4.

If so, then these verses instigate a third accusation against Edom (and this time, against other nations as well): the appropriation of Judean land in the wake of Judah's fall and exile. As is often the case when implementing the principle of measure for measure (as can be seen, for example, in Joel 4:8), Israel, the wronged party, will be the agents of the nations' punishment for their offenses. This principle, thrice articulated in Obadiah, is manifested here in the double use of the root ירש, "to inherit" or "possess": "and the house of Jacob shall *take possession* of those who *dispossessed* them" (v. 17). The nations are charged with seizing Judean land following the destruction in 586 B.C.E., which took place only after Judah's exile, so this prophecy can be dated later than the second unit of Obadiah.

Summary of the Three Prophecies in Obadiah

Obadiah's message is thus composed of three disparate prophecies, each articulated in a different political reality. The first, vv. 1–9, reflects the period before Judah's destruction in 586 B.C.E. In this unit, the prophet accuses Edom of hubris. The second prophecy, vv. 10–14 + v. 15b, describes Edom's offenses during the actual destruction and their role in Judah's downfall.

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29. Concerning the borders of the state of Yehud during the Persian Era, see E. Stern, "The Province of Yehud: The Vision and the Reality," in *The Jerusalem Cathedra*, ed. L. I. Levine, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi, 1981), 9–21; C. E. Carter, *The Emergence of Yehud in the Persian Period: A Social and Demographic Study*, JSOTSup 24 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 90–99. Concerning Edomite settlement in southern Judah, see Albright, "History," 1–6. About the Shephelah as an area outside Yehud, see Carter, *The Emergence of Yehud*, 90–99.

30. For a summary of this point, see G. N. Knoppers, "Revisiting the Samarian Question in the Persian Period," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Persian Period,* ed. O. Lipschits and M. Oeming (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 269–70.

31. According to the Masoretic version of the text, which has מורשיהם, "their possessions." The Septuagint, Peshitta and Vulgate have מורישהם, "their possessors." This reading is also found in the Murabba'at Inscription. Verses 19–20, however, list the areas Judah will inherit, so the Masoretic version is preferable.

The third relates to the period after the destruction, when neighboring nations took advantage of Judah's exile and seized their land in the south, the west, the north, and the east. The prophet formulates three separate accusations, each corresponding to a different time period: arrogance, the destruction and ruin of Jerusalem, and the appropriation of Judean land.

The Compilation Process of Obadiah

It is worth noting that from a purely chronological perspective, these prophecies could well have been composed within a short period of time. The first may have been written shortly before 586 B.C.E., the second during the destruction itself, and the third several years later, so that a single author could easily have written all three, or adapted the first from Jeremiah and added the latter two himself. The more intriguing and significant question concerns the literary relationship between the different prophecies. Are they a collection of oracles about Edom from different periods, or a single work composed of three separate parts? We have already noted the text's lack of obvious partitions, such as indicative formulas at the beginning and end of each prophecy, which has justifiably convinced many that the book of Obadiah is a single consecutive, cohesive unit. Moreover, certain word patterns testify to the work's unity. The central theme of Obadiah is Edom, and accordingly, the word *Esau* appears seven times (vv. 6, 8, 9, 18 [2×], 19, 21). Remarkably, the name Esau (by itself, rather than as part of the phrase "Mount Esau" or "the House of Esau") features only once (v. 6), as does the name "Jacob" (v. 10). The phrase "House of Esau" appears twice (v. 18)—and so does the phrase "House of Jacob" (vv. 17, 18). "Mount Esau" is mentioned four times (vv. 8, 9, 19, 21), while the phrases "Mount Zion" and "My holy mountain" appear a total of four times as well (vv. 11, 16, 17, 21). At the same time, however, the text clearly refers to three different periods, distinguished by different historical circumstances. If so, then how can we explain the book's composition, its concurrent diversity and unity?

I would hypothesize that the three prophecies were not written as three individual units; rather, each was appended to its predecessor. The first prophecy was composed before the destruction; and the prophet updated the first oracle and added the second prophecy, vv. 10–14 + v. 15b, during or immediately after the destruction, so that Edom stood accused not only of arrogance but of actual offense against Judah. Moreover, Edom's hubris seems to have been given practical expression through their negative, gloating antagonism during Jerusalem's fall. Not long afterwards, Edom gradually infiltrated Judah's territory, together with other nations, and was therefore chastised in the third prophecy, vv. 15a, 16–21, for yet another offense: seizing Judah's inheritance.[32]

32. Kasher shows that the contradictions in the book of Ezekiel are not an indication of different sources, but the fact that the prophet changes his mind on certain subjects

If these three prophecies indeed reflect three distinct but consecutive periods in history, then the book of Obadiah is plausibly an oracle twice revised in light of political and historical circumstances. The second prophecy does not annul the first or render it irrelevant; the same is true of the third. Rather, they provide new information. The final product is one continuous work, but its composition was accomplished in three stages. This explains, on the one hand, its stylistic cohesion and the lack of opening and closing formulas that usually mark the boundaries of a prophecy; on the other, certain inconsistencies between the different sections testify to the fact that they were composed during different historical realities.

These different historical backgrounds confirm that the book's composition took place gradually, while the unity of the final product is expressed most prominently through the principle of *lex talionis*, which operates consistently throughout the work. In each prophecy, this principle is fulfilled in a different sense. In each prophecy, the prophet describes another of Edom's sins and predicts that their punishment will follow the principle of measure for measure.

The Meaning of Obadiah's Prophecy

The book of Obadiah presents Edom's destruction as the twin of Israel's redemption, like in Isa 34–35; 62–63; Ezek 35–36; Lam 4:21–22; and Ps 137. As I have asserted in other sources, the prophet Obadiah refers Edom in a literal, rather than symbolic, sense. This is more easily supported in this case than in other sources, but many scholars insist on interpreting Edom in Obadiah as a symbol of all the nations, or of evil,[33] despite strong evidence to the contrary. Edom features as a nation dwelling on certain territory with specific topographical characteristics (v. 3); Mount Esau is described as adjacent to the Negev (v. 19) and refers to an actual place, which is inconsistent with the notion that Edom functions in this passage as a symbol. Edom is twice referred to as a brother, a description which does not apply to other nations, but only to those perceived as Esau's descendants. Appropriately, Esau's name appears seven times in the text. Moreover, the prophecy clearly distinguishes between Esau and the other nations (vv. 2, 7, 19)—in the first unit, Edom is even attacked by other nations—and it is therefore problematic to state that Edom represents them.

Like Ezekiel, Obadiah declares that Edom will be punished by Israel (vv. 17–20). The most likely explanation for this proclamation is that Judah feared that Edom was an alternative candidate for God's chosen nations, so the prophet asserts that Israel themselves will wreak vengeance on Edom for their offenses. Through this retaliation, Israel will return to its former glory.

over time. See R. Kasher, "Remnant, Repentance, and Covenant in the Book of Ezekiel," *Beit Mikra* 44 (1999): 15–34 [Hebrew].

33. See my discussion on pp. 82–84, "But Esau I despised."

The second prophecy accuses Edom of concrete offenses against Judah during Jerusalem's destruction: of entering Jerusalem and taking captives (v. 11); of betraying Judean soldiers (v. 13); of cutting off refugee's escape routes and betraying Judah's survivors (v. 14). Besides these grave acts of hatred, Edom is also reproached for failing to help Judah (v. 13) and for gloating at Israel's downfall (v. 12). Judah's indignation at these lesser crimes can only be fully understood if the psychological implications of these offenses are taken into account. Edom's failure to come to their brother's aid and their rejoicing at Judah's downfall was interpreted as the triumph of the elder brother reclaiming his birthright; as part of the age-old struggle between the sons of Isaac. Therefore, even emotional aspects, seemingly secondary to greater crimes, occupy an important place in the prophecy.

Although other nations are also incriminated in Obadiah's third prophecy, focus remains on Edom; this is presumably because they posed the greatest threat to Israel, being perceived as an alternative chosen nation. Accordingly, Obadiah employs the same tactic as other prophets, and pits Edom against God. Edom's destruction is not only a prerequisite for Israel's redemption but also for God's reign. This declaration strikes the final chord of Obadiah's prophecy, v. 21:

> Those who have been saved shall go up to Mount Zion to rule Mount Esau; and the kingdom shall be the LORD's.

Conclusion

The book of Obadiah must occupy a central place in any discussion about Edom, not least because the entire work is devoted to the subject of Edom's destruction. No other nation is the sole subject of an entire prophetic work.

The book of Obadiah is composed of three different prophecies, each accusing Edom of a different violation; each is settled with its own penalty. The first prophecy, (vv. 1–9), implicates Edom for its arrogance; this arrogance will be corrected through utter humiliation. The second oracle (vv. 10–14 + v. 15b) charges Edom with grave war crimes against Judah during Jerusalem's fall. Edom cut off Judah's refugees; hence they will be cut off. The third prophecy (v. 15a + vv. 16–21) penalizes Edom, as well as other neighboring nations, for seizing Judean territory. In retaliation, the prophet promises that Judah will reclaim their inheritance, as well as the lands of their colonizers. Each crime is met with a punishment according to the principle of measure for measure.

The first oracle, which reproaches Edom for an iniquity unrelated to Judah, predates the destruction. Most of its verses are parallel to Jer 49, which also takes place before the fall of Jerusalem, and does not accuse Edom of any offense against Judah. The second prophecy is later and reflects Judah's allegations against Edom for their role in Jerusalem's destruction. The third was composed shortly after, during the restoration period, when Judah re-

turned to their land to find it occupied by different nations. The Edomites had appropriated the southern part of Judah's territory.

The three prophecies are fused to create a single work, composed over the course of several years, and revised according to the shifting historical reality of Judah and Edom's relationship. The result is a cohesive literary work whose closely related units—each accusing Edom of a different crime—represent the rapidly changing attitude toward Edom during the tumultuous years immediately before, during, and after Judah's exile.

Obadiah's negative attitude toward Edom is striking. Out of all the nations who drank on God's holy mountain, Edom receives unparalleled attention, despite Obadiah's clear implications that Edom were not the only offenders—or even the most grievous offenders (v. 11). This disproportionate hostility emanated from Judah's disproportionate fear at Edom's part in their downfall; because Edom's acts were interpreted as the continuation of Esau and Jacob's struggle, and because Judah felt rejected by God, Israel's indignation at Edom far exceeded the scope of their actual offenses. This illuminates why the prophet must castigate Edom for their gloating, which seems otherwise insignificant in contrast to their war crimes and why he emphasizes that Israel themselves will execute judgment against Edom: Edom's downfall is a stepping stone to Israel's redemption. In order to express that the relationship between God and Israel did not change in the wake of Israel's downfall and Edom's triumph, Edom's sins are portrayed as violations against God, and Edom's obliteration is described as an integral part of divine supremacy.

Chapter 11

The Prophecy of Malachi 1:2–5

Introduction

Neither the book of Malachi itself nor external sources give a clear indication of the work's time of compilation. There is no information provided about the prophet, his place of origin, or any other biographical detail—it is not even clear if Malachi is his name or an epithet. Despite this lack of information, scholars generally agree that Malachi was the last of the prophets, and that he lived in Yehud after the reconstruction of the temple in the 5th century B.C.E. It is unclear whether he was the contemporary of Haggai and Zechariah or of Ezra and Nehemiah or whether he lived shortly afterwards. Precise information regarding the time of his career, however, is not crucial to the understanding of his words.

His book opens with a harsh anti-Edomite prophecy (vv. 2–5), stating God's love for Jacob and abhorrence of Esau. The rest of the book is seemingly unrelated to these opening lines. The second prophecy reproaches the priesthood and the nation for bringing defective sacrifices (1:6–2:9), the third criticizes intermarriage (2:10–16), the fourth and sixth deal with reward and punishment for the righteous and the wicked (2:17–3, 6; 3:13–21), and the fifth reproaches the people's dishonest dealing with tithes (3:7–12). There is no obvious connection between God's anti-Edomite statement and the rest of the book, and indeed, some hold that is there is no relationship between this declaration and the ensuing prophecies.[1] Others explain that the first prophecy discusses Judah's external affairs, while the rest deal with Judah's internal affairs.[2] The question of the opening verses' connection to the rest of the book is related to Malachi's harsh, specific opprobrium of Edom. We will address both issues below.

The Unique Attitude toward Edom in Malachi's Prophecy

Why, out of all nations mentioned in prophetic literature, does Malachi's prophecy concern Edom? Scholars have grappled with this question, some reaching the conclusion that Malachi does not refer to the historical nation of Edom, but to Edom as a symbol of all other nations.[3] Once again, it is

1. Nogalski, *Redactional Processes*, 193. In his opinion, Mal 1:1–5 is a summary of the entire series of the Twelve Minor Prophets. See ibid., 194.

2. Kaufmann, *Religion*, 8:368.

3. A number of scholars claim that, here, Edom symbolizes all of Israel's enemies. See Cresson, "The Condemnation of Edom," 125–48; Hoffman, "Edom as a Symbol of Evil," 76–89.

obvious why scholars have resorted to this explanation, but it is far from obvious why out of all nations, the prophet supposedly chooses Edom to serve as a symbol. We have already discussed, however, why this theory is problematic, and these problems apply equally in this instance. Verses 3–4 mention Edom's geographical borders, which indicates that Malachi relates to the actual nation of Edom rather than to a symbol of the nations.

The question, therefore, remains: why is Edom singled out as the object of God's hatred, and why does the book of Malachi open with a declaration of love for Israel and hatred against Edom? One possibility is that the prophet wishes to open the book with a statement of God's love as a preemptive declaration before his ensuing harsh reproach.[4] This does not explain, however, why this love is expressed together with a declaration of hatred toward Edom.

This issue can also be clarified in light of my proposed theory. In many biblical sources, the word "love," אהב, is used in the sense of choice, selection. This is the case, for example, in Hos 11:1; Ps 47:5; 78:68. Similarly, the word "hate," שנא, often expresses rejection,[5] as in Hos 9:15. In these opening lines, Malachi grapples with the people's notion that God has rejected them and chosen Edom in their place. The prophet is not speaking of love and hatred in an emotional sense but is wielding a discourse of divine selection and rejection.[6] It remains to ask why the issue of Israel's election and Edom's rejection is raised here, at the beginning of the book of Malachi.

In order to understand this, we will once again mention Judah's reaction to the destruction of Jerusalem and their exile; their sense of rejection and abandonment, and conviction that they were no longer the chosen nation. As noted, this is clearly reflected in various biblical sources (Lam 3:8, 18; Ezek 34:1–14; Jer 33:24–26; Isa 41:8). Despite the people's return to Zion, their sense of despair did not lift, due to several factors. Despite the repatriation of their homeland, their economic situation was still dire,

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4. For example, W. Rudolph, *Haggai—Sacharja 1–8—Sacharija 9–14—Maleachi*, KAT (Gutersloh: Gutersloher, 1976), 195; A. E. Hill, *Malachi*, AB 25D (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 146. It is difficult to accept Snyman's claim that the prophecy is declaring that God loves Israel, but not that God hates Edom. See S. D. Snyman, "Antitheses in Malachi 1, 2–5," *ZAW* 98 (1986): 436–38, 438.

5. See Eichrodt, *Theology*, 256–57; Jenni, E., "*ahev* to love." *TLOT* 1:45–54; R. A. Mason, *The Books of Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi*, CBC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 255; Hill, *Malachi*, 147. When the word אהבה appears in the context of God and the nation, it frequently relates to the obligation of keeping God's covenant with the people. See W. L. Moran, "The Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy," *CBQ* 25 (1963): 77–87; see also Fishbane, "The Treaty Background," 313–18.

6. A survey of the different opinions of the meaning of love and hate in this context can be found in P. L. Redditt, "The God Who Loves and Hates," in *Shall Not the Judge of All the Earth Do What Is Right? Studies on the Nature of God in Tribute to James L. Crenshaw,* ed. D. Penchansky and P. L. Redditt (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 175–90; Assis, "Why Edom," 1–20.

and may have been exacerbated by various natural disasters. Monarchy had not yet been reestablished as the prophets had promised, and the status of Zerubbabel,[7] the next link of the Davidic dynasty, was lowly. Moreover, the disappointing number of Jews returning to Zion, and Judah's lack of political independence[8] cast a shadow of doubt over the belief that this indeed marked the beginning of the redemption process. I have elsewhere claimed that this skepticism and persistent sense of God's rejection led them to postpone the rebuilding of the Second Temple; the prophet Haggai struggles against the people's emotions and asserts that God did not abandon them but has returned to their midst (Hag 1:13; 2:4).[9] His objective was not only to guide them through a dark time[10] but to encourage them that they were still God's chosen people. The harsh emotions toward Edom, as reflected in the Exilic and Postexilic Periods, are directly related to the people's fear that their covenant with God had been breached.[11] Because Edom was identified with Esau, the rejected twin of Jacob, the nation feared that Edom had now been elected in their place, especially in light of their role in Judah's downfall and colonization of their abandoned land.

Malachi therefore begins with a fierce declaration to dispel the nation's fear. He confirms that Jacob is still God's beloved, chosen people by establishing that God despises Esau: "but Esau I despised."[12]

This explains precisely why Malachi's prophecies begin with predicting doom for Edom; his words are a balm to soothe the defeated, broken people. Their sense of identity had been undermined and the prophet seeks to undermine the nation of Edom in return, in order to help Israel regain their footing. This is an especially fitting introduction to the book of Malachi, which is concerned with Judah's national identity to an extent that has previously been overlooked by scholars. The nation's identity comes

7. Even if it is correct, as some scholars claim, that the Davidic dynasty was not cut off with the destruction in 586 B.C.E., its status was seriously impaired in wake of the destruction. See P. Sacci, "L'esilio e la fine della monarchia davidica," *Henoch* 11 (1989): 131–48; esp. pp. 137–39; F. Bianchi, "Zorobabele re di Giuda," *Henoch* 13 (1991): 133–50; A. Lemaire, "Zorobabel et la Judée à la lumière de l'épigraphie (Fin du VIe s.av. J.-C)," *RB* 103 (1996): 48–57; H. Niehr, "Religio-Historical Aspects of the 'Early Post-exilic' Period," in *The Crisis of Israelite Religion: Transformation of Religious Tradition in Exilic and Post-exilic Times*, ed. B. Becking and M. C. A. Korpel (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 229–31.

8. The ruturn to Zion is the situation described in Zech 1:17; 2:8, which describes that Jerusalem was inhabited by only a small number. This situation even persisted until Nehemiah's time, 7:4. For Judah's lack of political independence, see Bright, *History,* 346.

9. E. Assis, "To Build or Not to Build: A Dispute between Haggai and His People," *ZAW* 119 (2007): 514–27; for a variation of this understanding, see J. Kessler, *The Book of Haggai: Prophecy and Society in Early Persian Yehud,* VTSup 91 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 150.

10. This is the opinion of H. W. Wolff, *Haggai, A Commentary*, trans. M. Kohl (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), 50, for example; and C. L. Meyers and E. M. Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1–8*, AB 25B (New York: Doubleday, 1987), 35.

11. Assis, "Why Edom," 1–20; idem, "From Adam to Esau and Israel," 287–302.

12. For a literary analysis of this prophecy, see Snyman, "Antitheses," 436–38.

under particular scrutiny in Malachi's third prophecy, which criticizes the issue of intermarriage.

The prophet employs rhetorical devices in an attempt to persuade the people and lift them from their degraded state, as is evident from the structure of his opening lines. His words are arranged in three chiastic structures:[13]

1. (A) I have *loved you*,
    (B) *says* the Lord.
    (B′) But you *say*,
   (A′) How have *you loved* us? . . .
2. (A) yet *I have loved*
    (B) *Jacob*,
    (B′) But *Esau*,
   (A′) *I have despised* . . .
3. If Edom says,
   (A) We are *shattered*,
    (B) but we will *rebuild* the ruins; the Lord of hosts says,
    (B′) They may *build*,
   (A′) but I will *tear down*.

Connections between Malachi's Prophecy against Edom (1:2–5) and against Intermarriage (2:10–16)

As noted above, scholars have generally perceived the opening prophecy against Edom as a separate introduction, isolated from the rest of the book, but a careful reading of the text shows that this conviction is misguided. Malachi's opening statement is profoundly connected to his third prophecy, which denounces the practice of intermarriage with foreign women (2:10–16). The two prophecies share common motifs and keywords, and both are concerned with the issue of national identity.

The words *love* and *hate* function as keywords in both prophecies, while Malachi does not use them in the rest of his book. The root "love" appears three times in 1:2 and once in the third prophecy in 2:11. The root "hate" features in 1:3 and again in 2:16. These words herald the main subject in both oracles. In regard to Edom, the nation accuses God of despising Israel and loving Esau in their place (1:3); in regard to intermarriage, the nation is accused of loving foreign women (2:11) and divorcing their Jewish wives, while God professes hatred for divorce (2:16).

Both prophecies employ the motif of father and son. The first prophecy depicts Esau and Jacob as brothers, with God their father-figure. Jacob

13. Ibid.

complains that the father favors his brother Esau; in response, God declares love for Jacob and hatred for Esau, who will shortly be punished. God also functions as a father-figure in the third prophecy, where the people are cast in the role of son (2:10). I will later describe how the motif of father-son relationships is given a surprising twist in the latter prophecy.

While the rest of the book of Malachi revolves solely around internal issues, these two prophecies concern external entities which threaten Judah's identity as a nation. In both, Judah's identity is established by negating and rejecting an external factor. In the first oracle, God asserts that Jacob is the chosen son by rejecting Esau (1:3); in the third, the prophet expects Israel to protect its identity by refusing relationships with foreign women (2:15–16).

These shared features are by no means coincidental and should not be overlooked. What is the nature and meaning of the connection that the prophet establishes between these two issues: between Israel's election and Edom's rejection, and the phenomenon of intermarriage?

A Warning against Intermarriage (Malachi 2:10–16)

Scholars hold different opinions regarding the subject of Malachi 2:10–16. Some interpret the phrase "married the daughter of a foreign god" (v. 11) in the sense of idol worship and read the descriptions of relationships between a man and a woman as an allegory for God's relationship with Israel.[14] But this interpretation is problematic because of the inconsistent use of gender in these verses; Judah is presented as both male and female,[15] and it is difficult to read the prophecy figuratively because Judah is not consistently portrayed as female.[16] Moreover, in other biblical sources that depict Israel's infidelity, the nation is always likened to a woman betraying

14. C. C. Torrey, "The Prophet Malachi," *JBL* 17 (1898): 1–15; A. Isaaksson, *Marriage and Ministry in the New Temple: A Study with Special Reference to Mt. 19. 13–12 [or rather, 3–12] and 1. Cor. 11. 3–16*, trans. N. Tomkinson, Acta Seminarii Neotestamentici Upsaliensis 24 (Lund: Gleerup, 1965), 31–32; G. P. Hugenberger, *Marriage as A Covenant: A Study of Biblical Law and Ethics Governing Marriage Developed from the Perspective of Malachi*, VTSup 52 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 34–36. See also D. L. Petersen, *Zechariah 9–14* and Malachi: A Commentary, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 195–206. He argues that the subject of 2:10–15a is reproach for the worship of Asherah, while vv. 15b–16 were added by an author who was concerned with the subject of divorce and therefore wished to interpret the previous verses in that sense. Glazier-McDonald understands the verses to have a double meaning and that there are rhetorical intentions in the connections between the two meanings. B. Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi: The Divine Messenger*, SBLDS 98 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 120. For further details about this approach, see B. Glazier-McDonald, "Intermarriage, Divorce, and the *bat-ʾel nekar*: Insights into Mal 2:10–16," *JBL* 106 (1987): 607–11. Shields believes that this section was divided into two: the first part, vv. 11–12, are figurative, while vv. 13–16 should be read literally. M. A. Shields, "Syncretism and Divorce in Malachi 2:10–16," *ZAW* 111 (1999): 68–86.

15. J. M. O'Brien, "Judah as Wife and Husband: Deconstructing Gender in Malachi," *JBL* 115 (1996): 241–50.

16. Ibid., 247–50.

her husband, who represents God. The image of an unfaithful husband marrying the daughter of a foreign god is not easily read as an allegory because it deviates considerably from the usual biblical metaphor. The text is therefore best read in its literal sense; as a prophecy that reproaches Jewish men for marrying foreign women, devoid of reference to syncretic worship.[17] Verse 11 should therefore be interpreted as condemnation of marrying the daughters of people who serve foreign gods. Verses 13–16 describe the anguish and misery caused by men who abandon the Jewish wives of their youth (vv. 14–15). Verse 16 mentions God's abhorrence of divorce: "For I hate divorce, says the Lord, the God of Israel." This verse is not a separate discussion about the issue of divorce; rather, it presents a socioethical aspect of intermarriage, one that emerged when Judean men married foreign wives after divorcing the Judean wives of their youth. God despises divorces of this nature, expresses the prophet. This declaration can also be understood as God's opinion of divorce in general, but this verse contains no implication that divorce is forbidden.[18]

The prophet relates to two different aspects of the problem of intermarriage. One is religious: marriage with foreign women is considered an abomination, a desecration of God's sanctity, vv. 11–12. Another issue is moral, criticizing Judean men who dismissed their wives in order to marry foreigners, who were presumably younger women.[19]

What was the people's motivation to marry foreign women? No adequate answer is provided in Ezra 9–10 or Neh 9:1–3, which address this issue. Glazier-McDonald surmises that their dire economic situations led

17. S. R. Driver, *The Minor Prophets*, CB (Edinburgh: Jack, 1906), 312; R. L. Smith, *Micah–Malachi*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word, 1984), 47, 49; Rudolph, *Haggai—Sacharja 1–8—Sacharija 9–14—Maleachi,* 271; S. Schreiner, "Mischehen—Ehebruch—Ehescheidung: Betrachtungen zu Mal 2:10–16," *ZAW* 91 (1979): 207–28; M. A. Zehnder, "Fresh Look at Malachi II 13–16," *VT* 53 (2003): 224–59. Scholars are divided in regard to the identity of the foreign women in Ezra and Nehemiah. Dor holds that women in question are the remnant who remained in the land and were not exiled to Babylon. Others claim that the women are Samaritan, while others believe the women are from different nations. See Y. Dor, *Have the "Foreign Women" Really Been Expelled? Separation and Exclusion in the Restoration Period* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2006), 104–26 [Hebrew]; 136–38.

18. Catholic exegesis bases its prohibition of divorce on this verse, although this is not the correct interpretation of the text. The verse prohibits not divorce but God's negative attitude toward it. The Sages also condemned the practice of divorce but did not forbid it (see the Babylonian Talmud, tractate *Gittin* 90a. Not a single biblical source implies that divorce is forbidden. For a discussion of the Catholic interpretation, see W. R. Sperry, *The Book of Malachi*, IB 4 (New York: Abingdon, 1956), 1120, 1136; Smith, *Micah–Malachi*, 325; J. G. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (London: Tyndale, 1972), 241; P. A. Verhoef, *Haggai and Malachi*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 279–81; for an opinion against this interpretation, see E. M. Schuller, *The Book of Malachi*, NIB (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 866–67; E. Assis, "Love, Hate and Self-Identity in Malachi: A New Perspective to Mal 1:1–5 and 2:10–16," *JNSL* 35 (2009): 109–20, 110.

19. Smith, *Malachi*, 52; Zehnder, "Fresh Look," 224–59.

Judean men to marry women who were more financially secure.[20] While this hypothesis is unsupported in the text, she also raises a likelier theory: the tolerant atmosphere of the Persian regime encouraged the phenomenon of intermarriage.[21] I believe that these verses in Malachi provide the only insight into the ideology that triggered this phenomenon.

Mal 2:10 states: "Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our ancestors?" Most read this verse as the prophet's words to the people, attempting to persuade them to serve God together; they are all the sons of one father, and they have mutual responsibility to keep the divine covenant. Intermarriage is a betrayal of the brotherhood that exists among the people of Judah. According to this reading, the prophet is the speaker, and he appeals to the people. When he says "Have we not all one father?" he is referring to their common ancestors: to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, or to their Father in heaven.[22] When he asks "why then, are we faithless to one another," the brotherhood he describes is the fraternal bond between the people of Judah. Finally, the "covenant of our ancestors" is God's covenant with Israel, established at Sinai. If this reading is correct, however, then what is the meaning of the rhetorical question in v. 10, "Has not one God created us?" Why is the fact that one God created them all relevant to his claim? On the contrary, God did not create Israel alone, but the entire world and all of humanity, so this statement blurs the distinction between Judah and the surrounding foreign nations, rather than reinforcing it.

In my opinion, this common interpretation is completely erroneous, and stems from the readers' failure to correctly identify the verse's speaker or the structure of the dialogue in this prophecy. The only exegete who takes the latter into account is R. Isaac Abravanel, who writes that the speakers of v. 10 are the people who have married foreigners and are attempting to justify their actions. According to this reading, the phrase "why then, are we faithless to one another" refers to the universal bond of humanity, rather than the exclusive fraternity of Judah. "Have we not all one father" does not allude to Israel's common ancestor but to God, father of all humanity. In this context, their rhetorical question, "has not one God created us," is most fitting, as it highlights their connection with other nations, rather than their differences. The speakers of this verse are adhering to the idea of universal equality; all are descended from one person, all were fashioned by one Creator, and all are equal in the eyes of God. According to this paradigm, the broken covenant mentioned is the betrayal

20. Glazier-McDonald, "Intermarriage, Divorce," 604–5.

21. Ibid.

22. This explanation is held by Smith, for example, *Malachi*, 47; a number of exegetes and scholars believe that this phrase refers to the nation's forefathers. Ibn Ezra, for example, writes that this refers to Jacob, and so does Radak. See also Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi*, 237.

of the value that all humans are equal, which is a fundamental principle in their argument. This notion is based on the belief that all humans are God's creation, as depicted in the creation narrative in Genesis. Through this belief, they justified the practice of intermarriage, which they perceived as a practical implementation of the value of universal equality. The taboo on intermarriage was, in their eyes, an affront to this ideology, rooted in the creation narrative of Genesis, which claimed that all men are equal and there is no essential difference between nations. This is the world view the prophet must contend with, and he quotes their words at the beginning of his prophecy in order to repudiate their claims.

Not only does this reading illuminate the meaning of v. 10; it also reveals that the structure of the prophecy is consistent with the dialogic form of Malachi's other prophecies.[23] According to this interpretation, the prophecy opens with the nation's claim, which is immediately refuted by the prophet. This pattern is evident in each of Malachi's oracles: the first prophecy opens with the people's disbelief that God loves them (1:2). In the second prophecy, the people challenge God's words in 1:6. The fourth is in 2:17, the fifth is in 3:8, and their sixth and final challenge is posed in 3:13. A clear pattern emerges: in each oracle, the prophet presents the people's claim and immediately repudiates it. If this interpretation of v. 10 is rejected, then the third prophecy is the only one that deviates from the pattern of disputation that forms the structure of the book. This reading also showcases the prophet's rhetorical skill, for his response in v. 11 corresponds closely with the people's argument in v. 10.

Verse 10, the people's claim:

> Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our ancestors?

In v. 11, the prophet responds:

> Judah has been faithless, and abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the Lord, which he loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign god.

The people believe that they are part of a universal covenant, so that refusing to marry outside of Judah is an offense against humanity: "Why then are we faithless to one another," and can even be perceived as "profaning the covenant of our ancestors." Malachi uses the same terminology to answer their claim, but to opposite effect, arguing that marrying the daughters of those who worship foreign gods is "profan[ing] the sanctuary of the Lord." Such relationships are in fact a betrayal and an abomination against God: "Judah has been faithless, and abomination has been committed in Israel." The prophet uses this language to express that refraining from in-

23. E. Pfeiffer, "Die Disputationsworte im Buche Maleachi: Ein Beitrag zur formgeschichtlichen Struker," *Evangelische Theologie* 19 (1959): 546–68.

termarriage is neither treachery nor a breach of any covenant. On the contrary—marrying foreign wives and rejecting their own Jewish wives is a breach of the sacred covenant of marriage: "Because the Lord was a witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant" (v. 14).

Intermarriage was an integral part of the universal, tolerant zeitgeist of the Persian era, which favored the blurring of boundaries between nations. According to this worldview, all men were created equal, so that assimilation was not frowned on but encouraged as an expression of the universal human bond, as reflected in Mal 2:10.

Understanding the Connection between the Prophecy against Edom and the Prophecy against Intermarriage

We can now return to the connection between Malachi's first prophecy, which concerns Edom's destruction, and his third, which addresses the problem of intermarriage. We have already noted the linguistic and thematic parallels between the two prophecies, and we are now equipped to understand the nature of this connection. I believe that the people's universal worldview, reflected in their justification of intermarriage in 2:10, stems from their belief that God has rejected them as the chosen nation, which is implied in their question in the first prophecy, concerning Edom. The destruction of the temple and Jerusalem, together with their exile, resulted in the notion that they had lost their special status and had become a nation like any other. This despair and sense of abandonment explains their loss of identity as God's chosen nation. In the book of Malachi, we can trace how this despair and rejection, their belief that they had become a nation like any other, gave birth to their ready embrace of the notion that all people and all peoples are equal and equally worthy. This paradigm was given practical expression in the act of intermarriage. The prophet therefore attempts to tackle this worldview by asserting that Israel is still God's chosen nation; they are still elevated among other nations, and are therefore obligated to retain this identity by preserving the holiness of their seed and refraining from assimilation with other nations.

Scholars have recognized that the accepting, tolerant attitude of the Persian Empire was an important factor in the postexilic rise of intermarriage.[24] While this certainly contributed to Judean intermarriage during the time of the Persian Empire, I believe that this phenomenon was more strongly motivated by an internal Judean identity crisis. At the very least, this universal principle was more readily embraced because the broken Judeans were no longer convinced that they were God's chosen people; they were therefore more than willing to trade their shattered national identity in exchange for the consoling notion of universal equality.

24. Glazier-McDonald, *Malachi*, 605.

Conclusion

The book of Malachi makes the most significant contribution toward understanding of the biblical attitude toward Edom after the destruction. The vehement anti-Edomite prophecy reveals—in its rawest form—the people's tortured belief that God had rejected them and chosen Edom in their place. The prophet therefore unequivocally states that Edom, not Judah, is the despised nation; that Judah is still beloved, still chosen.

Malachi's oracle takes place after the temple had already been rebuilt in 515 B.C.E. The people's sense of abandonment that began after their exile persisted even after they had returned to their land; still far-removed from their former state of glory, their sense of national identity remained insecure. Many had remained in exile, their economic situation was dire, their land had been occupied by foreigners, Judean monarchy had not yet been reinstated. All these factors contributed to the perception that God's covenant with Israel had been supplanted by a new divine bond with Edom. The prophet refers to Edom as Esau and to Jacob as Israel, reflecting the people's belief that Edom had been chosen because Esau was Jacob's twin and therefore God's alternative chosen son.

This desperation is already evident in earlier biblical sources. The book of Malachi reflects the same old despair in new guise. The nation's skepticism of its identity has metamorphosed into ideology: they may not be the chosen people, but all people were created equal. Thus, the linguistic and thematic connections between Malachi's first and third prophecies hint at a deeper, more profound connection between them: the people no longer believe that they are unique; that they have a special place in God's design. This sense of failure and repudiation leads to the breakdown of barriers between Israel and other nations. Intermarriage has become an ideology that bandages their gaping wound of rejection; Israel reassures itself that all nations are equal and weds foreign women in a practical implementation of their new value.

This is the ideology that Malachi now grapples with, emphasizing that Edom is still rejected, while Israel is still the chosen nation. The people must uphold their special status because despite their complex situation, they are *not* like other nations. They must cease assimilation and spurn intermarriage because this practice is an act of profanity, not morality; an act of social offense, not social value.

Chapter 12

The Anti-Edomite Ideology of the Genealogical Lists in 1 Chronicles 1

Introduction

Chapters 1–9 of 1 Chronicles are a collection of genealogical lists that constitute a prologue to the book.[1] Chapters 2–9 present the genealogy of the tribes of Israel,[2] and ch. 1 is foreword to this prologue, presenting the genealogical lists from Adam to Jacob. Scholars disagree regarding the time of the book's composition; the opinion that the author lived in the Persian Era is logical, although the precise time cannot be pinpointed.[3]

The genealogical lists in the first chapter are based exclusively on the parallel lists in the book of Genesis. Some quote the original source in Genesis

1. E. L. Curtis, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Chronicles*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1910), 6; J. M. Myers, *I Chronicles*, AB 12–12A (New York: Doubleday, 1965), 6; W. Rudolph, *Chronicbücher*, HAT (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1955), viii; Japhet, *Chronicles,* 8. Welch is convinced that chs. 1–9 are a later addition. See A. C. Welch, *Post-exilic Judaism* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1935), 185–87; A. C. Welch, *The Work of the Chronicler: Its Purpose and Its Date*, Schwelich Lectures of the British Academy 1938 (London: Oxford University Press, 1939), 1. See also F. M. Cross, "A Reconstruction of Judean Restoration," *JBL* 94 (1975): 4–18, esp. pp. 11–14. This opinion, however, was not accepted in modern research; see H. G. M. Williamson, *Israel in the Books of Chronicles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 71–86; H. G. M. Williamson, *1 and 2 Chronicles*, NCBC, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1982), 12–15; Japhet, *Chronicles*, 5–7. Willi believes that chs. 1–9 are the basis of the entire book of Chronicles. See T. Willi, *Chronik*, BKAT (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1991), 5–6.

2. On the objectives of the genealogical lists in general, see Wilson, *Genealogy and History*; M. D. Johnson, *The Purpose of Biblical Genealogies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 77–82.

3. Some hold that the work dates back to the Preexilic Period, while others date it later, to the Hellenistic era. Most hold that it was compiled during the Persian era. Curtis, Myers, Japhet, and Williamson believe it can be dated to the end of the fourth century B.C.E. See Curtis, *Chronicles*, 6; Myers, *I Chronicles,* lxxxix; Japhet*, Chronicles*, 27–28; Williamson, *Israel in the Books of Chronicles*, 83–86. Freedman believes that it was composed shortly after the rebuilding of the temple (515 B.C.E.): D. N. Freedman, "The Chronicler's Purpose," *CBQ* 23 (1961): 436–42. Klein is correct in cautiously stating that the exact time of composition cannot be determined, beyond the fact that the Chronicler lived after the return to Zion: R. W. Klein, "Chronicles, Book of 1–2," *ABD* 5:995. Knoppers raises the possibility that there is a connection between the genealogical lists of Chronicles and Greek genealogical lists, emphasizing that Greek cultural influence began before Alexander the Great. In his opinion, Chronicles formed a certain bridge between the Persian ear and the Hellenistic era. See G. N. Knoppers, *I Chronicles 1–9*, AB 12 (New York: Doubleday, 2004).

directly, while in other cases the Chronicler summarized longer lists (compare, for example, 1 Chr 1:1–3 with Gen 5:1–31). The Genesis source material is also abridged through the omission of opening and closing phrases and information such as geographical descriptions of the descendants' native lands. Esau and Edom occupy a central place in this first chapter; out of 54 verses, 20 are devoted to Esau's dynasty (vv. 35–54). This chapter will examine Edom's place in the beginning of the book of Chronicles.

The Purpose of the Genealogical Lists

The chapter opens with the names of Adam and his third son, Seth, tracing their line until Noah without including any names that are extraneous to this dynasty. The ten names are listed in three short verses. Upon reaching Noah, the Chronicler expands the dynasty by listing the descendants of all three of his sons, Japheth (vv. 4–7), Ham (vv. 8–16), and Shem (vv. 17–23). Leaving Japeth and Ham's lines dangling, the Chronicler then focuses solely on the branch of Shem until the tenth generation, Abram, once again reverting to the laconic style of the first three verses, which list names without any conjunctions or prepositions between them, father-son-grandson (vv. 24–28). Abraham's line commences in v. 28 and includes Ishmael's genealogy and Abraham's descendants from his concubine Keturah (vv. 28–33). Verse 34 marks the beginning of Isaac's genealogy, which is divided into two: the chapter continues and concludes with Esau's genealogy (vv. 35–54), while the next eight chapters describe the genealogies of Jacob's sons.

The biblical scribes were generally concerned with ideology and theology, and these spheres informed the form and content of their compositions. This is also evident in the genealogical lists of 1 Chr 1–9, which bear the author's theological and ideological fingerprints.

Some consider the genealogical lists of chs. 2–9 an overview of Israelite history.[4] Many are convinced that the focus of the book of Chronicles is the Davidic dynasty that reigned in Judah, whose capital was Jerusalem, with the temple at its heart.[5] Accordingly, they argue that the genealogical history of the Israelite tribes is designed to validate and elevate the Davidic line.[6] Others hold that chs. 2–9 convey that the postexilic Judean community is the direct, unbroken continuation of preexilic Judean society; these chapters emphasize Israel's covenant, continuity, and restoration after the destruction.[7]

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4. R. Braun, *1 Chronicles*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word, 1986), 5.

5. Freedman, "The Chronicler's Purpose," 436–42.

6. Myers, *I Chronicles*, 6; Duke explains that the main focus of the lists is on the royal dynasty of David. R. K. Duke, *The Persuasive Appeal of the Chronicler: A Rhetorical Analysis* (Sheffield: Almond, 1990), 55.

7. Williamson, *Chronicles*, 2; see also P. R. Ackroyd, *The Chronicler in His Age,* JSOTSup 101 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 67–68; L. C. Allen, *The First and Second*

In parallel to the debate about chs. 2–9, scholars are also divided in regard to the objective of the genealogical lists of ch. 1, which name the generations from Adam to Jacob. Some read them as an introduction to the Israelite dynasties in chs. 2–8,[8] functioning as a foreword to the book's prologue.[9] The primordial genealogy serves to map out Israel's place within the dynasties that constitute the fabric of humanity.[10] This perspective characterizes the Chronicler as an enthusiast of family trees, fascinated with unearthing genealogical roots and disentangling branches to achieve a sense of grounding, of belonging.[11]

Others hold that the chapter has ideological value in itself, some believing that ch. 1, like chs. 2–8, is designed to exalt the Davidic monarchy. This notion is chiefly based on several unique features of Esau's genealogy.[12] Another scholarly conviction is that the lists in ch. 1 aim to emphasize the idea of Israel's selection by virtue of contrast with the partial, incomplete mention of the peripheral branches. For the same reason, the dynasties of the rejected sons are always mentioned before focus begins on the chosen line.[13]

Books of Chronicles, NIB (Nashville: Abingdon), 1999, 313; Johnson, *The Purpose of Biblical Genealogies*, 78. A variation of this opinion can be found in Y. Levin, "Who Was the Chronicler's Audience? A Hint from his Genealogies," *JBL* 122 (2003): 229–45. For the approach that Chronicles was intended for a postexilic audience, see W. M. Schniedewind, *The Word of God in Transition: From Prophet to Exegete in the Second Temple Period*, JSOTSup 197 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 249–52. For the argument that the lists were designed to elevate the chosen line, see E. A. Speiser, "The Wife-Sister Motif in the Patriarchal Narratives," in *Biblical and Other Studies,* ed. A. Altman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 15–28. Knoppers holds that the description of the twelve tribes within their portions, which far exceeded the boundaries of Yehud, reflects the ideal state of a vast Judean kingdom. See Knoppers, *I Chronicles 1–9*, 262.

8. Even though we are familiar with the source material of ch. 1, some scholars claim that several additions were made to the original text; see I. Benzinger, *Die Bücher der Chronik*, KHAT (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1901); Rudolph, *Chronik*, 6–7; this opinion was rejected by Japhet and Curtis, who claim that there were no later additions made to ch. 1. See Curtis, *Chronicles,* 57–58; Japhet, *Chronicles*, 55–56. See also Williamson, who argues that the lists were an inseparable part of Chronicles. Williamson, *Israel in the Books of Chronicles*, 71–82.

9. R. M. Brunet, "Le Chroniste et ses Sources," *RB* 60 (1953): 483–508.

10. S. J. De Vries, *1 and 2 Chronicles*, FOTL 11 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 34; J. E. Dyck, *The Theocratic Ideology of the Chronicler*, Biblical Interpretation 33 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 129; Johnstone, *Chronicles*, 27; Knoppers, *Chronicles 1–9*, 247–48; see also Levin, "Who Was the Chronicler's Audience," 234–35.

11. Concerning the ancients' motives for recording genealogies, see Knoppers, *Chronicles 1–9*, 245–46; 250–51.

12. Japhet, *Chronicles,* 63–64; W. Johnstone, *1 and 2 Chronicles*, vol. 1: *1 Chronicles 1–2* Chronicles 9: Israel's Place among the Nations, JSOTSup 253 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 34–35.

13. M. Oeming, *Das wahre Israel: Die "genealogische Vorhalle" 1 Chronik 1–9*, BWANT (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1990), 89–91. I thus disagree with Willi's opinion that ch. 1 is designed to emphasize the unity of humankind and its common origin. See Willi, *Chronik,* 47–49.

The objective of ch. 1, I believe, can be determined through a careful study of the slight changes the Chronicler makes to the source material in Genesis. The sources of the detailed lists of the Israelite tribal genealogies in chs. 2–8 are not always known to us, and it is evident that the Chronicler used material that is no longer extant. In contrast, as mentioned, the lists in ch. 1 are entirely based on the parallel lists in the book of Genesis. There is no way of knowing whether he had access to lists besides those found in Genesis, but the fact that we have the Chronicler's sources in our possession allows us to penetrate his methodology through comparison of the book of Chronicles and the text of Genesis. A comparison of the two works indicates a strong correlation between the later text and its source and also reveals some minor changes.[14] Even such minor deviations from the source have the power to expose the Chronicler's objectives and intentions, allowing us to determine their historical background. But the connection between the book of Chronicles and Genesis is liable to mislead the reader, who must carefully distinguish between the meaning of these lists in their original context in Genesis, and their recharged ideology when they are placed within the new context of Chronicles, whether this recontextualization generates new ideas, or emphasizes certain aspects of the text that may expose the work's worldview based on its historical context.[15]

The deviations between 1 Chr 1 and the book of Genesis can be categorized into three different types.

1. *Abbreviation of the Genesis material*. For example, the long genealogical description of Adam's descendants in ch. 5 is reduced to three brief verses in 1 Chr 1:1–3. Likewise, Noah's genealogy in Gen 11:10–32 is also condensed to three verses, vv. 24–27. These laconic verses even omit conjunctive words, reducing detailed genealogies to a mere list of consecutive names—"Adam Seth Enosh." Without access to the source in Genesis, there would be no way of knowing that these verses list a grandfather, father, and son. This dramatic abbreviation serves to catalyze movement through the generations until the text reaches a significant figure. The first three verses aim to transport the reader from Adam until Noah, while vv. 24–26 leap from Noah until Abraham.[16]

2. *Changes of order in the lists*. These changes are insignificant, and stem from technical reasons relating to their new context. (a) In Genesis, Ishmael's chronicles (25:12–16) are listed after the lists of Keturah's sons (25:1–6).

14. Curtis asserts that the fact that the Chronicler provides lists without mentioning the connection between them proves that he assumed that his readers are familiar with the source in Genesis. See Curtis, *Chronicles*, 57. Concerning the relationship between the lists in Chronicles and their source in Genesis, see de Vries, *Chronicles*, 33.

15. This confusion is evident in the study of Johnstone, who applies information provided in Genesis to the first chapter of 1 Chronicles. Johnstone, *Chronicles*, 27–28.

16. There is no reason to accept Rudolph's claim that the similar structures of vv. 1–4 and 24–27 shows that they are the original text, while vv. 4b–23 are a later addition. See Rudolph, *Chronik*, 6–7. See Willi's objection to this opinion, *Chronicles*, 15–16.

In Chronicles, this order is reversed in order to suit the heading "the sons of Abraham: Isaac and Ishmael" (v. 25). After this introduction, Ishmael's descendants are listed first. In Genesis, Ishmael's dynasty follows that of the sons of Keturah in order to juxtapose Ishmael's line (25:12–18) with the story of Isaac's family (25:19–26).[17] (b) The list of Jacob's sons in Genesis (35:23–39) precedes the list of Esau's descendants (v. 36). In Chronicles, Esau's descendants are listed first because Jacob's dynasty is detailed over the following chapters, consistent with Chronicles' tendency to present the rejected dynasties before the chosen line.[18]

3. Additions and changes the Chronicler makes to the Genesis text are the most substantial type of difference between the two works. (a) Verse 27 is the Chronicler's addition: "Abram, that is, Abraham." This statement is intriguing because there is no corresponding verse in Genesis;[19] it marks the end of the brief description of Noah's dynasty. This dynasty appears in Genesis in 11:10–32, but there is no parallel phrase in this context. Essentially, v. 27 is a condensation of the story of Abraham's renaming, which in Genesis appears much later, in ch. 17. (b) Keturah's sons are referred to differently in the two works. Chronicles 1:32 refers to "The sons of Keturah, *Abraham's concubine*: she bore Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah." In contrast, Gen 25:1–3 describes that "Abraham *took another wife, whose name was Keturah*. She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah." (c) These changes reveal that Chronicler's description of the family-cum-nations is not merely an introduction, but the agent of its own message. These two changes are related to the book's characterization of Israel as the chosen people in contrast to the other, rejected branches of the family.[20] The verse that expresses Abraham's selection most strongly in ch. 1 is "Abram, that is, Abraham" (v. 27).[21] His name change in Gen 27 is inextricably related to his election as father of the chosen nation. This episode in Genesis introduces the act of circumcision, which expresses God's covenant with Abraham and his descendants, together with the announcement of Isaac's birth and Abram's change of name to Abraham. The Chronicler's words, "Abram, that is, Abraham," are designed to evoke this covenant and assert that the central idea of these lists is the election of Abraham and his seed.

17. For another explanation of the reversed order between the sons of Keturah and Ishmael, see Knoppers, *Chronicles 1–9*, 278.

18. Japhet, *Chronicles*, 53. I therefore disagree with Williamson's claim that, because there is no theological justification in presenting the sons of Keturah and Ishmael in the opposite order of their presentation in Genesis, it should be concluded that the list of Keturah's sons in 1 Chronicles 1 is secondary. See Williamson, *Chronicles,* 43.

19. Knoppers, *Chronicles 1–9*, 278.

20. Japhet, *Chronicles* 8–9; Allen, *Chronicles*, 317; Johnstone, *Chronicles,* 30.

21. I agree with Williamson's claim that the Chronicler meant to emphasize that Israel was rooted in Jacob by breaking the genealogical pattern with Jacob's mention. Williamson, *Israel in the Books of Chronicles*, 63. However, there is no need to adopt his claim that Abraham has no importance in the chapter; on the contrary, the verse "Abram, that is, Abraham," proves the opposite. See Myers, *Chronicles*, 7.

The second change mentioned is the result of Isaac's election as Abraham's sole heir. The book of Genesis seeks to present Isaac as Abraham's successor, so the narrative reports that Abraham presents the sons of Keturah with gifts and sends them away, while Isaac inherits his entire estate (25:5–6). The Chronicler, who omits even brief narrative details from his genealogies, nonetheless aspired to retain the impression that Isaac was chosen while the rest of Abraham's sons were rejected. He achieves this by demoting Keturah from the rank of wife to the lowlier status of concubine.

Edom in the Book of Chronicles' Introduction

According to a number of scholars, the central theme of ch. 1 is indeed Israel's election.[22] However, two changes that the Chronicler makes to the Genesis source suggest that another, more specific idea motivates this chapter. The first change is found at the beginning of Esau's genealogy, and the other at the end of the list of Edomite kings. Verse 51 concludes with the phrase "And Haddad died," which is unparalleled in Genesis. In v. 34, the introduction to Isaac's dynasty lists Esau before Jacob, and we will begin our discussion with this observation.

Ishmael's chronicles, listed in vv. 29–31, are followed by Isaac's line (v. 34 and on). Similarly, among Isaac's descendants, Esau's sons are listed before the Israelites. The chapter consistently mentions the rejected son (Ham, Ishmael, and Esau) before the chosen son (Shem, Isaac, and Jacob). However, the narrative introduction to each genealogy does not consistently follow this pattern. The introductory verse to Abraham's descendants lists Isaac before Ishmael: "The sons of Abraham: Isaac and Ishmael" (v. 28), even though Ishmael was born first, in order to present Isaac as Abraham's successor.[23] Indeed, following Keturah's sons and Ishmael's dynasties, a phrase appears that is unparalleled in the chronologies of Genesis: "Abraham became the father of Isaac" (v. 34). These slight changes are obviously designed to emphasize that Abraham's other sons are rejected, while Isaac is Abraham's heir. But following the logic of this pattern, it is unclear why Esau precedes Jacob: "The sons of Isaac: Esau and Israel" (v. 34).[24] Jacob,

22. Williamson, *Israel in the Books of Chronicles*, 63; Williamson, *Chronicles*, 40–41; S. Japhet, *The Ideology of Chronicles and Its Place in Biblical Thought*, trans. A. Barber, Beiträge zur Erforschung des Alten Testaments und des Antiken Judentums 9 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1989), 116–24.

23. Curtis, *Chronicles*, 71; in contrast to Coggins, who explains that it is unclear why the verses first mention Isaac and only then Ishmael, who was born first. See R. J. Coggins, *The First and Second Books of Chronicles*, CBC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 14.

24. In version B of the Septuagint, "Israel" is listed before Esau. Version A is identical to the Masoretic version. Benzinger believes that B is the original. See Benzinger, *Chronicles,* 3. Curtis holds that Israel ought to be listed before Esau, according to the theme of Chronicles, mentioning the chosen son before the rejected, even if he is younger. Curtis, *Chronicles*, 76. Williamson, Japhet, and Willi correctly adopt the Masoretic version.

like his father, is also the younger but chosen son; if Isaac is listed before Ishmael, why is Jacob not listed before Esau?

Japhet believes that this inconsistency stems from the verses' reliance on Gen 25:9, where Isaac is mentioned before Ishmael, and Gen 35:29, where Esau precedes Isaac,[25] but this connection is problematic for two reasons. First, the verses in Chronicles serve as an introduction to their dynasties, whereas the verses in Genesis concern Abraham and Isaac's burial. Second, the Chronicler only draws on the genealogical sections of Genesis, not the narrative sections, whereas the verses Japhet refers to belong to the latter category. Rather, these introductory verses seem to be an addition of the Chronicler, and this inconsistency should be explained based on the Chronicles text itself, rather than attributed to an external source.[26]

This problem can be explained differently by redefining the objective of the lists of family-cum-nations in Chr 1. Isaac's mention before Ishmael in v. 28 indeed reflects the notion (confirmed in the Genesis narratives of Abraham) that Isaac is Abraham's heir, while Ishmael is the rejected son who will not continue his father's line. Genesis 16:1–2 relates that Abraham and Hagar's union is the result of the initiative of Sarah, who intends the raise the child as her own son. This does not go according to plan, however, and with Abraham's consent, Sarah banishes Hagar. God promises Abraham that Sarah's own son will be his heir (17:15–21) and supports Sarah's banishment of Hagar and her son: "Do not be distressed because of the boy and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be named for you" (21:12). This declaration is never challenged in the narrative, and neither Hagar nor Ishmael's perspective is presented.

In contrast, the tension surrounding Jacob's election and Esau's rejection is the focal point of the narrative; that Jacob is chosen and Esau rebuffed is not unequivocal in the text. Not only is Esau's perspective given

It seems that the Vatican's version of the Septuagint emended the text and reversed the order of the brothers in order to suit the principles inferred from v. 28. See Williamson, *Chronicles*, 44; Japhet, *Chronicles,* 62; Willi, *Chronicles*, 14. Myers also favors the Masoretic version, *Chronicles I,* 4. Another indication of the Masoretic version's authenticity is that the Septuagint has "Jacob" and not "Israel," whereas the Chronicler usually uses the name Israel rather than Jacob.

25. Japhet, *Chronicles*, 53; Braun, *1 Chronicles*, 22.

26. A commentary on Chronicles is ascribed to one of the students of Saadia Gaon, and published by Raphael ben Simeon Kirchheim in 1874. His commentary on v. 28 reads: "Isaac is listed first for two reasons: firstly, because of his honor and importance, and secondly, because the verse reads 'the sons of Abraham' and not 'the sons of Abram,' and starting from the time he became Abraham, Isaac was born first." On v. 34: "The sons of Isaac, Esau and Israel, Esau was listed first because there is little to say about him and he wished to be rid of him quickly and end with Israel, as the entire book revolves around him, so [the Chronicler] listed the one about whom there was little to say first and bequeathed him Mount Seir, and then began to tell of the sons of Israel, whose stories are many and their matters lengthy."

space in the story but the brothers' struggle for the blessing and the birthright is a central subject in Genesis. This conflict begins in their mother's womb, continues with Jacob's purchase of the birthright in exchange for a mess of pottage, and culminates in the twins' preparation of a meal for Isaac before his death. Esau does so at his father's command, while Jacob's mother helps him deceive his father in order to receive the blessing promised to Esau. This deception moves Esau to plot to kill his brother, and at his parents' bidding, Jacob flees to Haran. Even after 20 years, Jacob does not believe that the conflict with his brother has come to an end, and he meets his brother in great trepidation, which once again raises the fraternal struggle in the reader's conscious (Gen 32:3–17).

While Ishmael is the son of a concubine, which is presumably the main cause of his rejection (Gen 21:11), Esau and Jacob are twins. As we discussed above, simple logic does not dictate that one of them must be excluded, and there is no obvious reason why only one of them should inherit their father's legacy. Isaac was presumably of this mindset when telling Esau he wished to bless him. The blessing he intended to bestow was a material blessing of abundance and wealth, unrelated to Abraham's legacy, which designates the chosen heir (Gen 27:28–29). The material blessing intended exclusively for Esau was a suitable blessing for a firstborn, rather than a sign of Jacob's rejection.[27] Only later does Isaac adopt his wife's view that younger twin is the chosen son, and before Jacob is sent to Haran, Isaac bestows Abraham's blessing on him. However, as we saw in our analysis of the narrative, at this point, Jacob is not convinced that he is the chosen son. He is only reassured of this upon his return 20 years later, having received Abraham's blessing from God when Esau is no longer in the land. In any event, in contrast to Ishmael's explicit rejection, the reason for Esau's exclusion is never obvious, and never explained in Genesis.

In light of this analysis, we can surmise that Esau's mention before Jacob in Chronicles 1 reflects the equivocal narrative of Genesis, where Jacob's status as the chosen son is not obvious, and therefore Esau, the eldest son, is mentioned before Jacob because of his primogeniture.

However, this explanation seems to contradict the chapter's propensity to present Israel as the chosen dynasty. Why does the Chronicler choose to replicate the complex reality maintained by the narrative in Genesis, rather than the culmination of this struggle—Jacob's election and Esau's rejection?

I have extensively discussed the reason behind postexilic biblical hostility toward Edom: how the nation was broken following the destruction.[28] Another dimension of this despair was the fear that God had turned from Israel and elected Edom in its place. The nation was anxious that Edom was

27. See above, pp. 30–33. See also B. Jacob, *Das erste Buch der Tora: Genesis* (Berlin: Schocken, 1934), 573.

28. See above, pp. 84–90.

eligible for this status because of the tradition that they were descended from Esau, Jacob's twin brother. As I have already argued, the strained relationship between Esau and Jacob and their struggle for the birthright were an integral part of Israel's heritage; they knew that they had been elected and their "brother" rejected, but like readers of the Genesis narrative, they were not quite sure why. In Genesis, Jacob is confirmed as heir to the covenant when he returns to Canaan and Esau has left; in 586 B.C.E., when Israel is ejected from their land and Esau begins to settle it, the "brothers'" positions seems to have been reversed.

The Edomite problem was experienced as an existential threat by the returning Judeans, whose loss of collective identity as God's chosen people gravely contributed to their crisis. In my opinion, the Chronicler seeks to present Israel as God's nation, and in order to appeal to his postexilic audience, he emphasizes Edom's rejection, like many of his contemporaries. This is already expressed in his introduction to the book: although Esau is mentioned before Jacob, the latter is already referred to as Israel, the name that represents his election as the heir to the covenant: "The sons of Isaac: Esau and *Israel*" (v. 34).

Like many other postexilic sources, the Chronicler defines Israel's identity in direct relation to the Edomite threat. In dialogue with the reality of his nation's situation, in order to reflect the national fear at Esau's triumph, in v. 34, Esau is listed before Israel. His ultimate objective, however, was not merely to echo their fear but to uproot and dispel it, like his scribal contemporaries. He seeks to achieve this through a narrative addition at the end of the Edomite royal dynasty: "And Haddad died" (v. 51).

Verses 43–54 list the eight kings of the Edomite dynasty who ruled in Edom before the establishment of Israelite monarchy. This passage is a direct quotation of Gen 36:31–43, with the exception of a single detail that initially seems insignificant. The Chronicler adds the words "and Haddad died" at the end of v. 51, words that do not appear in Genesis. This addition is puzzling, given that the two passages are otherwise identical.[29] Why would the Chronicler make such a trivial addition to the source material? Moreover, the mention of each king's death in the passage is a transitional phrase that marks the end of the first king's reign and anticipates his successor.[30] This is evident in comparison with the subsequent list of chieftains, whose deaths are not noted. Because Edom's chieftains do not seem to be considered successors of the Edomite monarchy, mention of Haddad's

29. Curtis's solution is that these words are probably a scribal error. Curtis, *Chronicles*, 78. Braun proposes that the words were added by the author for the sake of unity. See Braun, *1 Chronicles*, 23. Knoppers understands that the words should be understood as "when Haddad died." Knoppers, *Chronicles 1–9*, 271. But there is no basis for this understanding.

30. J. R. Bartlett, "The Edomite King-List of Genesis XXXVI 31–39 and 1 Chron 1 43–50," *JTS* n.s. 16 (1965): 301–14.

death is superfluous, and this is presumably why his death is not noted in the source in Genesis.

If statement of a king's death indeed marks the transition between reigns, then mentioning Haddad's death is redundant—unless the Chronicler's objective in ch. 1 is to emphasize the fall of the Edomite dynasty. Just as declaration of the king's death anticipates the rise of the next king—the King is dead, long live the King!—the intentional announcement of the death of the final king serves to highlight the dynasty's lack of continuity, its termination, the end of the line. When this termination is immediately followed by the detailed, profuse genealogical lists of Israel's tribes, the impression created is of Israel's rise in the wake of Edom's fall; of the setting of the Edomite empire and the dawning of Israel.

This addition, which underscores Edom's demise, can only be understood as part of the anti-Edomite discourse of the Chronicler's postexilic era. Like his prophetic counterparts, the author of the book of Chronicles also seeks to present Israel as the chosen nation and Edom as a rejected, unwanted nation with no future.[31]

This understanding illuminates why the royal Edomite dynasty is included in 1 Chr 1. Until now, I have discussed the differences between Chronicles and Genesis; no less important is determining the Chronicler's criteria for choosing what material to include, and what to omit. The Chronicler's methodology is to list the central dynasty from Adam to Abraham, only mentioning secondary branches briefly before returning to the main line. He therefore includes only selected genealogical material from Genesis. In light of this selection, the list of Edomite kings seems anomalous, as this list is not strictly a description of Esau's line; according to the principles of the chapter, it would be more logical to include only lists of Esau's direct descendants. Edom's royal dynasty does not fit this criterion; why, then, did the author include it as part of the highly selected material in ch. 1?

This difficulty led some scholars to conclude that these verses were a later addition.[32] However, Williamson rightly challenges this notion by questioning why a later redactor would add material inconsistent with the chapter's general structure.[33] Johnson argues that ch. 1 of Chronicles includes all of the material in Genesis.[34] This is not accurate, because the list of chieftains in Genesis 36:15–19 is omitted.[35]

31. Unlike Coggins, who holds that 1 Chr 1 is not anti-Edomite. See Coggins, *Chronicles*, 16. De Vries is also convinced that Esau's relatively long genealogy is ironic in light of the negative attitude toward Idumea following the exile. De Vries, *Chronicles*, 34. These scholars, however, failed to note the anti-Edomite attitude toward Esau in this chapter.

32. Rudolph, *Chronik,* 7.

33. Williamson, *Chronicles*, 44.

34. Johnson, *The Purpose of Biblical Genealogies,* 74.

35. Williamson, *Chronicles*, 44.

Japhet lists several unique phenomena concerning Edom's genealogy; I wish to note two of them. While the list of Edom's chieftains features directly after the royal Edomite dynasty, like in Genesis, this material is abridged in Chronicles. Genesis's line is introduced with the heading "These are the names of the chiefs of Esau, according to their families and their localities by their names" (36:40), while Chronicles introduces them thus: "The chiefs of Edom were" (1:51). In this context, Japhet notes the fact that the royal Edomite dynasty of Chronicles includes the additional phrase, "and Haddad died," (as noted above). In her opinion, these changes are designed to present the list of chiefs as a continuation of the royal dynasty. This arrangement describes the two periods of leadership: Edom was first ruled by eight kings, who established different capital cities for themselves; monarchy ceased with the death of Haddad, and thereafter Edom was governed by judges. This development should be understood in light of the phrase "before any king reigned over the Israelites" (v. 43). Before David rose to power, Edom had its own system of monarchy; afterwards, Edom was ruled by local chieftains, judges. According to Japhet, this passage aims to glorify the Davidic line.[36] Johnstone develops this theory, noting that there are 13 generations between Abraham and the end of the list of Edomite kings, while in parallel, David is Abraham's 14th descendant. He argues that this conveys how monarchy passed from Edom to Israel, elevating Israel's royalty over Edom's. Moreover, Edom's kings are from different families, while David's lineage is pure.[37]

This explanation is problematic as the two lines—the royal dynasty and the list of chieftains—are presented separately in Chronicles as well as in Genesis, each with its own heading, even though the Chroniclers' list is shorter than the list in Genesis. It therefore seems unlikely that the sequence is designed to imply that an age of chieftainship followed the monarchic period, mirroring the stages of government in Israel.[38]

Rather than compare Edomite monarchy with the Davidic dynasty, I believe that this list aims to pit nation against nation, Edom against Israel. The phrase "before any king reigned over the Israelites" implies that Edom was initially given preference, its royal line preceding the establishment of monarchy in Israel. As part of this trend, Esau is mentioned before Jacob in v. 34, creating the impression that he is the favored son. This head start is only designed to increase the impact of Edom's downfall at the end of the list, to bring them crashing down from their pedestal: "Though you soar aloft like the eagle, though your nest is set among the stars, from there I will bring you down." At the end of the period of royalty, the Edomite dynasty is cut off, while the next chapters brim with lists of Jacob's descendants and culminate in Israelite royalty. The first chapter of 1 Chr 1,

36. Japhet, *Chronicles*, 63–64.
37. Allen, *Chronicles*, 319; Johnstone, *Chronicles*, 34–35.
38. Similarly, see Curtis, *Chronicles,* 79.

therefore, subtly participates in the postexilic anti-Edomite polemical campaign.[39] Chapter 1 does not merely aim to elevate the Davidic line over Edomite monarchy; its goal is broader—to elevate Israel over Edom. The Chronicler's adaptation of the source material in Genesis aims to glorify Israel as the chosen nation, while emphasizing Edom's rejection by declaring the death of its monarchy.

Conclusion

Scholars have emphasized the postexilic context of the book of Chronicles, particularly in regard to its introductory genealogical lists. The dynasties of chs. 1–9 are designed to generate continuity between the preexilic empire of Judah and the struggling community in postexilic Yehud of the Persian era. Chapter 1 participates in this agenda. My exploration of this chapter has honed its significance to a finer point, clarifying that the Chronicler's adaptation of the source material reflects the struggle to reinvent Judah's sense of identity at the beginning of the Persian era. The tiny, powerless community of Yehud questioned whether Judah could still be considered God's chosen people after their harsh punishment; whether the destruction of their temple, religious and political institutions, capital city, and their mass exile meant that God had abandoned Israel. One of the most ominous agents of this fear took the form of the Edomite colonization of Judah's land. In the eyes of the broken nation, Edom, Jacob's twin, was considered an alternative heir. The author of 1 Chr 1, like many other biblical authors of this era, sought to dispel these fears. The work's first chapter, therefore, takes the ambiguity of the Genesis narrative into account and presents Esau's potential as God's chosen son, but then asserts that this potential is shattered. Therefore, while Jacob and Esau are initially presented as equals, according to birth order, justifying Esau's ostensible role as an alternative to Israel, this notion is dispelled with the termination of Edom's royal line and the narrative's resumption of Israel's dynasty. Once the first chapter of the book has affirmed that the last king of Edom has died, chs. 2–9 describe the genealogical chain that leads to the undying line of David. The King of Edom is dead; long live the King of Israel!

39. Knoppers emphasizes that the attention of the author, who was in Yehud, was naturally focused on Edom, in southern Judah. See Knoppers, *Chronicles 1–9*, 294. In contrast, Willi is convinced that the Edomite background of the chapter is not based on the period following the destruction, but on the strained relationship between the nations over the course of history. Willi, *Chronik,* 26–27.

Chapter 13

Edom and Israel in Rabbinic and Medieval Literature

Until now, I have attempted to show that unlike the prevalent opinion in research, Edom does not function as a symbol in biblical literature. The prophecies against Edom predict doom for the actual nation of Edom, situated on the eastern side of the Arabah. In rabbinic and medieval Jewish literature, however, Edom does become a symbol, first, of the pagan Roman Empire, and later, when the Roman Empire converts to Christianity, Edom begins to serve as a symbol of this new religion. This is evident in fourth generation Tannaic midrashic literature—that is, beginning with R. Akiva's generation—which was apparently composed in the context of Bar-Kokhba's revolt and the fall of Betar.[1]

Tractate Taʿanit of the Jerusalem Talmud, ch. 4, law 5 (24a)[2] states:

> It has been taught that R. Judah the son of R. Ilai said, "Barukh, my master, would interpret, "The voice is the voice of Jacob and the hands are the hands of Esau"—Jacob's voice would cry out on account of what Esau's hands did to him at Betar.

This source refers to the final stage of Bar Kokhba's revolt, when Betar fell. The fall of Betar, following a three year siege, marked the end of the rebellion, and the Judean rebels were overwhelmed by Roman forces.[3] Scholars agree that Edom became a symbol for Rome after the destruction in 70 C.E.

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1. Cohen notes that R. Shimon bar Yohai's statement in the name of R. Akiva already hints at the identification of Rome with Edom. This statement appears in Bereshit (Genesis) Rabbah 65:21 (Theodore Albeck edition, 740) as well as in the Jerusalem Talmud, tractate Ta'anit, 4:5a: "It is taught that R. Shimon bar Yohai, in the name of R. Akiva, would interpret 'a star (*Kokhav)* shall come out of Jacob' as Bar Kokhba will come out of Jacob." Cohen reads the context of the verse "Edom will become a possession" as a hint that Rome is associated with Edom. See G. D. Cohen, "Esau as Symbol in Early Medieval Thought," in *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies,* ed. A. Altman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 22. Schremer disagrees with this identification: A. Schremer, "Midrash and History: God's Power, the Roman Empire, and Hopes for Redemption in Tannaitic Literature," *Zion* 72 (2007): 5–36, esp. p. 29 n. 72. However, the context of the Talmud shows that this association is correct, and the fact that this interpretation is mentioned by R. Akiva's students teaches that Cohen's claim is likely.

2. This source also appears in *Midrash Bereshit (Genesis) Rabbah*, 65 (Thedore-Albeck edition, p. 740).

3. S. Safrai, "The Era of the Mishna and Talmud," in *A History of the Jewish People,* ed. H. H. Ben-Sasson (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1978), 321 [Hebrew].

R. Meir, also a fourth generation Tanna and a student of R. Akiva, reads Isa 21:11 as "an oracle against Rome (רומא)" instead of "against Duma (דומה)" according to the Jerusalem Talmud (Vilna edition), tractate Taʿanit, 1:5:

> Said R. Haninah son of R. Abbahu, "In the book of R. Meir they found that it was written, "The oracle concerning Dumah, [that is,] the oracle concerning Rome. One is calling to me from Seir, 'Sentinel, what of the night? Sentinel, what of the night?'
>
> Said R. Yohanan, "One is calling to me because of Seir."
>
> Said R. Simeon the son of Laqish, "To me. From where shall there be a match for me? 'From Seir.'"
>
> Said R. Joshua the son of Levi, "If someone should say to you, 'Where is your God,' say to him, 'He is in a great city in Edom, [in Rome]. What verse is this based on? 'One is calling to me from Seir."

R. Shimon the son of Yohai (another fourth generation Tanna and student of R. Akiva), identifies Edom/Esau with Rome in the next part of this Talmudic dialogue:[4]

> Rabbi Simeon the son of Yohai teaches, "Wherever the Israelites were exiled, the Divine Presence accompanied them into exile.
>
> They were exiled to Egypt, and the Divine Presence accompanied them. Where is the basis for this in the text? "Thus the Lord has said, 'I revealed myself to the family of your ancestor in Egypt when they were slaves to the house of Pharaoh" [1 Sam 2:27].
>
> They were exiled to Rome, and the Divine Presence accompanied them. Where is the basis for this in the text? "One is calling to me from Seir, 'Sentinel, what of the night? Sentinel, what of the night?'" [Isa 21:11].

These are, of course, only examples of a vast corpus of sources, mainly Talmudic and post-Talmudic, where Rome is identified with Edom.[5] Scholars surmise that this identification originated at the same time that it first appeared in literature; during the period of Bar Kokhba's revolt. This theory must nonetheless be exercised with caution as it may have occurred earlier, despite lack of textual evidence to this effect. Feldman states that hints of this association can already be found in the works of Philo; the Testaments

4. A similar interpretation is found in the *Mekhilta*, only the verse used a reference to Edom is different. *Mechilta D'Rabbi Ismael*, Bo 14 (Horovitz edition pp. 51–52): "You find that wherever Israel was exiled, the Divine presence went into exile with them. . . . When they were exiled to Edom, the Divine Presence went into exile with them, as it is said, 'Who is this that comes from Edom' (Isa 63:1)."

5. Babylonian Talmud, tractate Megillah 6a-b; Gittin 56b; Makkot 12a; Avodah Zarah 10b; Jerusalem Talmud (Vilna ed.), Avodah Zarah 1:2; *Midrash Genesis Rabbah* 41:14 (Theodore-Albeck, p. 339), among many others.

of the Twelve Patriarchs, Gad, 7:4;[6] and the book of Enoch (89:12).[7] Feldman also claims that the writings of Josephus Flavius display a positive attitude toward Esau, which he attributes to Josephus's familiarity with the symbolic connection between Rome and Edom.[8]

How can the rabbinical identification between Rome and Edom, of all nations, be explained? Gershon Cohen reasonably posits that a more logical association could have been drawn between Rome and Babylon. Why is Rome, considered a descendant of Japhet, identified with Edom, a descendant of Shem?

Zunz explains that this is due to Herod's Edomite roots; Herod's tyrannical reign greatly oppressed the nation, and the people's antagonism was projected onto the empire with which he was associated.[9] This explanation was also adopted by Ginzberg,[10] but was rejected by Herr, among others. Herr argues that besides the lack of proof for this theory, Rome became identified with Edom long after Herod's time.[11] In his opinion, the Roman destroyers of the Second Temple became associated with the name Edom.[12] This answer seems unlikely because the Edomites fought against the Romans, together with the Judean Zealots, during the war preceding the destruction.[13]

I believe that this linkage is essentially related to the people's hope that Rome would be punished for its destruction of the temple. The nation undoubtedly craved vengeance and longed to witness Rome's downfall, and during that time, it was customary to comb the biblical sources for textual anchors for their hopes. The promise of Edom's punishment was intertwined with Israel's redemption,[14] and while Israel's greatest oppressors, such as Assyria, Babylon, and Egypt, had already fallen the prophets' dire warnings against Edom had yet to be fulfilled, particularly the parts predicting Israel's redemption. This was certainly true of the visions of Israel's rise in Obadiah, Ezek 35; Isa 34–35; and Isa 62–63. Thus, these prophecies

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6. J. H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1983–85), 1:816.

7. Ibid., 1:65.

8. L. H. Feldman, *"Remember Amalek!" Vengeance, Zealotry, and Group Destruction in the Bible according to Philo, Pseudo-Philo, and Josephus* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2004), 62–67.

9. L. Zunz, *Zur Geschichte und Literatur* (Berlin: Veit, 1845), 483.

10. L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, vol. 5 (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1949), 272 n. 19.

11. M. D. Herr, "Edom, in the Aggadah," *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 6: col. 378–79; against this opinion, see also Feldman, "Remember Amalek," 65.

12. Herr, "Edom," 379. He adds several explanations: Edom was compared to a pig, as was Rome; in Obadiah Edom is likened to an eagle (v. 4), which was also a symbol of Rome.

13. Kasher, *Jews, Idumaeans, and Ancient Arabs,* 225–13.

14. On this subject in the Second Temple period, see Schremer, "Midrash and History," 5–32.

about Edom swiftly evolved into predictions of Rome's future destruction. As Edom had been complicit in the destruction of the temple, and because the predictions of Edom's destruction were so drastically disproportionate to their actual offenses, the Sages, and the medieval commentators in their wake, easily fit Edom's oversized garments of condemnation onto Rome's massive frame. As Edom's role in the Babylonians' destruction of the Judah was emphasized in Lamentations, Ps 137, Obadiah, Joel and other sources, Edom readily became the typological symbol of a later nation who also destroyed Israel's temple. Prophecies that originally referred to the nation on the other side of the Arabah took on a new, relevant meaning in the period following the Second Temple's destruction, generating anticipation of Edom-Rome's fall and Israel's redemption.[15]

Cohen also posits that this association was typologically based. Edom's characterization in the anti-Edomite prophecies—its pride and sense of invincibility—was an apt description of the arrogant Roman Empire. Moreover, Cohen emphasizes, Edom's downfall was intertwined with God's sovereignty, and even more significantly, Rome, like Israel, perceived itself as a chosen nation; both nations were convinced of their unique destiny and divine election.[16]

The covert rivalry, as well as the similarity, between Rome and Israel is expressed in Midrash Genesis Rabbah on the verse "two nations are in your womb," 63:7:[17]

> Two nations are in your womb; two proud nations—both are proud of their place in the world; both are proud of their kingdom; two [leaders of] proud nations are in your womb—Hadrian among the nations, and Solomon in Israel; two hated nations are in your womb—all the nations hate Esau, and all the nations hate Israel. Those who hate your children are in your womb, as it is written, "But Esau I hated" (Mal 1:3)

Other sources also imply that the two nations cannot coexist, that Rome and Israel cannot prosper together, that eventually only one of the two will endure. The Talmud also links Rome and Edom in this context, as can be seen in the Babylonian Talmud, tractate Megillah 6a:

> [Concerning] Caesarea and Jerusalem: If one says to you that both are destroyed, do not believe him; if he says that both are flourishing, do not believe him; if he says the Caesarea is in ruins and Jerusalem is flourishing, or that Jerusalem is in ruins and Caesarea is flourishing, you may believe him, as it says, I shall be filled, she is laid waste, if this one is filled, that one is laid waste, and if that one is filled, this one is laid waste. R. Nahman the son of Isaac derived the same lesson from this source, "and one shall be stronger than the other."

15. See a similar formulation in Cohen, "Esau as a Symbol," 24–25.

16. Cohen, "Esau as a Symbol," 25–26. This direction was also taken by Feldman, "Remember Amalek," 65.

17. *Midrash Genesis Rabbah*, Theodore-Albeck edition, p. 685.

These dialogues are based on Rome and Israel's conflicting beliefs that each is the chosen nation. If so, then these sources provide a more profound reason for Rome's identification with Edom, based on our analysis of the relevant biblical texts. As we saw, the negative attitude toward Edom did not only stem from their offenses against Judah, but from the theological weight of these acts. Edom was perceived as Israel's brother, and the nation feared that they had supplanted Israel as the chosen nation following Judah's destruction and exile. A similar pattern can be observed in regard to the Roman destruction of the Second Temple. The Roman Army, who perceived themselves as a divinely elected nation, destroyed Judah's holiest site, casting Israel's sense of identity into doubt once again. In this respect, Edom was a tailor-made symbol for the Romans because they posed a threat to Israel's self-perception as the chosen nation.

Moreover, the correlation between Israel's situation after the destruction of the temple and their state after the destruction of the Second Temple and their corresponding attitudes toward Edom and toward Rome-Edom in the aftermath of each event are even more poignant. After the destruction of the Second Temple, the Jews were once again thrust into a state of utter despair, which is reflected in various sources. In the Syriac *Apocalypse of Baruch* (9:6–19) we find:[18]

> Blessed is he who was not born, or who was born and died. But we, the living, woe to us, because we have seen those afflictions of Zion, and that which has befallen Jerusalem. . . . You, farmers, sow not again. And you, O earth, why do you give the fruit of your harvest? Keep within you the sweetness of your sustenance. And you, vine, why do you still give your wine? For an offering will not be given again from you in Zion, and first fruits will not again be offered. And you, heaven, keep your dew within you, and do not open the treasures of rain. And you, sun keep the light of your rays within you. And you, moon, extinguish the multitude of your light. For why should the light rise again, where the light of Zion is darkened? And you, bridegrooms, do not enter, and do not let the brides adorn themselves. And you, wives, do not pray to bear children, for the barren will rejoice more. And those who have no children will be glad, and those who have children will be sad."

The aftermath of the second destruction saw a devastating religious crisis, until R. Yohanan Zakkai's efforts enabled the nation to retain a religious lifestyle without a temple.[19] This despair elucidates the nation's deep hostility toward Rome, who referred to themselves as the chosen nation, a claim that challenged Israel's self-perception. The biblical attitude toward

18. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2:624. For an indication that following the second destruction, people stopped eating meat and wine, see *Tosefta* of tractate *Sotah*, 9:11–16.

19. On R. Yohanan's undertaking, see G. Alon, *The Jews in Their Land in the Talmudic Age* (Bnei Barak: HaKibbutz HaMeuchad, 1971) 65–71 [Hebrew]; Safrai, "The Era of the Mishna and Talmud," 309–10.

Edom as Israel's alternative was therefore similar to the perception of Rome as Israel's usurpers.

The appellation of Edom easily accompanied the pagan Roman Empire during their conversion to Christianity, and in time became a euphemism for Christianity in general. The Jews consistently referred to Rome as Edom before, during, and after their conversion to a new religion. Meanwhile, the new Roman-Christian Empire's attitude toward the Jews did not improve, and the new monotheists continued persecuting the Jews with all the fervor of their pagan days. The empire's theological justification for this persecution did not diminish, but only changed form, and to a considerable extent, intensified.[20] Christianity is rooted in Judaism, and the Christians believed that they had become God's chosen people, while the Jews had lost their status when they refused to accept Jesus as their messiah. Now, more than ever before, the Jews were forced to compete against another group for the status of chosen people; this time, the title of true Israelite nation was at stake. Unlike Israel's relationship with the original nation of Edom, there is vast evidence of the Judeo-Christian conflict over the status of God's chosen people. Moreover, the Christians claimed that the Jewish nation had been rejected and therefore referred to them as Esau, whereas they—the younger, chosen religion—embodied Jacob.[21] At the same time,

20. See also: Cohen, "Esau as Symbol," 28–29. Concerning hostility between Jews and Christians prior to the conversion of the Roman Empire in the first 300 years of Christianity, see I. Baer, "Israel, the Christian Church and the Roman Empire from the Days of Septimius Severus to the 'Edict of Toleration' of 313 C.E," *Zion* 21 (1956): 1–49 [Hebrew].

21. The Jews are explicitly referred to as Esau by Hippolytus of Rome (170–235 C.E.), a disciple of Irenaeus (as quoted in Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies*, trans. J. H. Macmahon, Ante-Nicene Christian Library 6 [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1877]). Cohen explains that the Christian description of Israel as Edom, and the Jewish association of the Christians as Edom, developed as two separate processes, rather than the Christian designation of the Jews as Edom being in retaliation. See Cohen, "Esau as Symbol," 31. Yuval disagrees and proposes that the Jews referred to the Christians as Edom in retaliation against the Christians referring to them as Edom. I. J. Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 30–31. This suggestion is illogical; first, Yuval emphasizes that Paul identifies Israel with Esau and that he lived three generations before R. Akiva, who first referred to Rome as Edom. But this claim is incorrect; Paul does not make this association. Rather, he shows that Israel's election is unrelated to blood, proving this by showing that Ishmael and Esau were both rejected, even though they were the sons of Abraham—even Esau, who was both Isaac and Rebecca's son. Through this, Paul attempts to prove that the Jew's blood ties with Jacob do not necessarily entail their election. This raises the possibility that the Jews will be rejected in the future, and "Israel" elected in their place. He does not deny that the Jews are descended from Jacob; rather, he claims that, just as Esau was rejected, the Jews might be rejected later. Yuval's reading of Paul is therefore incorrect, while Cohen understands the source correctly; see Cohen, "Esau as Symbol," 32. Later Christian works by the fathers of the church do not associate the Jews with Edom either, despite Yuval's unsupported and inaccurate claim. Nor is this sort of claim made in the Epistle of Barnabas, despite Yuval's reading of an implicit typological identification of the Jews with Esau in this source. Rather, the latter source also claims that blood ties do not

the Jews obviously perceived the Christians as competitors for this status, and accordingly identified them with Edom, who represented an entity closely affiliated with Israel—yet rejected. While the Christians shared Judaism's monotheistic views and belief in the Bible, they were nonetheless the excluded brother. Once the Roman Empire had converted to Christianity, and the Christians ruled over the Jews in the medieval period, the Christian claim to supremacy over their brother nation was reinforced; the rapid spread and growing strength of Christianity strengthened their conviction in their own beliefs, while Judaism was forced into the theological defensive.[22] The Jews adopted various methods of dealing with Christian theology in attempt to reinforce their own sense of identity as the chosen people. A great corpus of polemical writings amassed on this subject, notably various anti-Christian commentaries on the Song of Songs that focused on Israel's future redemption.[23]

necessarily result in being part of the chosen line; it also emphasizes that the younger is often favored over the elder son and thus explains why Ephraim is favored over Menashe. The purpose of this observation is to justify how the younger church is favored over the older religion. Once again, however, there is no identification of the Jews with Edom. See "Epistle of Barnabas," in *The Apostolic Fathers*, ed. and trans. B. D. Ehrman (2 vols.; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 2:61–62. Yuval also sees Judaism's association with Edom in Justin Martyr's dialogue with Trypho, but once again, this association is not actually found in the text. Rather, this source compares Leah to the synagogue, and Rachel to the church. He also states that Jacob is Israel, who is Jesus. This may easily have led to the comparison of Judaism to Esau, but this is not actually stated in the text. The reason for this is that he says that Israel (that is, the Jews) were originally chosen, but they were rejected, and now the church continues Jacob's legacy. See St. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, trans. T. B. Falls, rev. T. P. Halton, Selections from the Fathers of the Church 3 (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 202–3. Irenaeus's second-century work, *Against Heresies*, also emphasizes that Esau was the firstborn, but Jacob takes the status of chosen son from him—similarly, the Jews were originally the chosen firstborns, but the Christians took this status from them. Just like Esau persecuted Jacob, he continues, the Jews persecuted the Christians because they took the birthright from them. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, trans. J. Keble, Library of the Fathers of the Holy Church (Oxford: Parker & Rivingtons, 1972), book 4, 376–77. Once again, Yuval incorrectly claims that this source presents a connection between Esau and the Jews. This is not the case; Irenaeus's point is that just as Jacob took the birthright from Esau, the Christians took the "birthright" from the Jews. Irenaeus does not associate *Edom* with the Jews in this source. Similarly, it is worth noting that the same is true of the aforementioned Hippolytus; he associates Israel with Esau, not with Edom.

22. Cohen, "Esau as Symbol," 36–38.

23. On anti-Christian polemic in exegesis, see E. E. Urbach, "Rabbinic Exegesis and Origenes' Commentaries on the Song of Songs and Jewish-Christian Polemics," *Tarbiz* 30 (1961): 148–70 [Hebrew]. On anti-Christian polemic in Rashi's commentary on the Song of Songs, see S. Kamin, "Rashi's Commentary on the Song of Songs and Jewish-Christian Polemic," *Shnaton* 7–8 (1983–84): 245–47 [Hebrew]. Concerning medieval polemics with Christians, see E. I. Rosenthal, "Anti-Christian Polemic in Medieval Bible Commentaries," *JJS* 11 (1960): 115–35; M. A. Signer, "God's Love for Israel: Apologetic and Hermeneutical Strategies in Twelfth-Century Biblical Exegesis," in *Jews and Christians in Twelfth Century Europe,* ed. M. A. Signer and J. Van Engen (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 123–48.

It is therefore no great wonder that medieval commentators interpreted various prophecies against Edom as anti-Roman narratives. This rendered the ancient texts into relevant sources for their own time; into sources that spoke of Israel's redemption from exile following the second fall of Jerusalem; into words that offered hope and encouragement during the dark reality of their persecution. The Sages' extensive use of the motif of Edom in relation to Christianity is beyond the scope of this study; however, it is worth exploring how some medieval exegetes interpreted the biblical prophecies against Edom.

As a significant portion of the exegetes who followed this direction were devoted to biblical analysis on a literal level, they chose to interpret these prophecies in relation to Rome and Christianity on a symbolic level in addition to the plain meaning of the texts as oracles about the actual nation of Edom.

Thus, Rashi applies Obadiah's prophecy to the historical nation of Edom, but to Rome as well. He explains v. 19, for example, as "Mount Esau—which is at the southern border." Regarding vv. 20–21, however, he writes: "The exegetes claim that Zarephath is the kingdom called France. As to Sepharad, Targum Jonathan interprets: 'Spain.' Mount Esau—according to Targum Jonathan, Esau is Rome."

Rashi interprets Jeremiah's prophecy against Edom in Jer 49:7–22 in a literal sense, beginning his commentary on 49:7 thus: "In Teman—Edom is south of the land of Israel." He also explains the other prophecies against Edom in the same way. One exception is his reading of Isa 63:1–6, where he writes: "The prophet is prophesying about the future." In light of the fierce anti-Christian polemics prevalent in Rashi's commentary, as many exegetes have noted, it is interesting that Rashi does not interpret most of the prophecies against Edom as predictions against Rome and Christianity.

Similarly, R. Joseph Kara interprets Obadiah's prophecy in literal terms, but unlike Rashi, he does not allude to the exile of Rome:

> "You should not have stood at the crossings"—because he was Jerusalem's neighbor, as Edom dwells at the southern border of Israel, and knows their comings and goings (on verse 14).

R. Joseph Kara does not explain any prophecies against Edom as predictions about Rome.

Ibn Ezra writes that Obadiah refers to the Edomite nation dwelling south of Judah, who commits offenses against Judah during Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of the temple. He comments on v. 10:

> "Violence" . . . this prophecy concerning Edom is after Jerusalem's exile to Babylon; as the lamenter says, "Remember, O Lord, against the Edomites" (Ps 137:7), who urged the Babylonians, "Tear it down! Tear it down!"; and it is written, "The punishment of your iniquity, O daughter Zion, is accomplished, he will keep you in exile no longer; but your in-

> iquity, O daughter Edom, he will punish" (Lam 4:22). Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Edom, and their land became a wasteland. And thus Malachi prophesied that Jerusalem would be restored after the exile of Babylon, but Edom would not.

He interprets v. 14 in the same vein:

> "Crossroads"—where the roads diverged; they told the Babylonians which way the fugitives had fled.
>
> Ibn Ezra interprets Edom's actions in light of the fact that Judah had ruled over them throughout the pre-exilic monarchic era: "'Do not'—Because Edom had always been under Judean rule, Edom's gloating was even more difficult for them" (Ibn Ezra on v. 11).

It is worth noting, however, that Ibn Ezra did not completely overlook Edom's symbolic association with Rome. Most of Obadiah is explained as a prophecy about the destruction in 586 B.C.E., but toward the end of the book, Ibn Ezra extends Obadiah's prediction of Israel's salvation to redemption from Roman exile. His interpretation of v. 20 reads thus:

> "Canaanites"—I have heard from great authorities that the land of Alamannia refers the Canaanites who fled from the Israelites when they arrived in the land; Likewise, Zarepath is France. And Targum Jonathan writes that Sepharad is "Spain"; and this refers to the exile of Titus. This is a prophecy for the future, unlike what R. Moses said, because they were then dispersed after the first Temple.

In his commentary on Ps 137, Ibn Ezra notes that many are convinced that this Psalm refers to Titus and the destruction of the Second Temple, but he disagrees, explaining that it refers to Edom and the First Temple, as is evident from the next verse, which mentions Babylon. He supports this argument with the historical claim that Titus was not of Edomite origin, but was descended from Greece.

> "Remember"—this does not refer to the exile of Titus, as many have thought, because it is followed with the phrase "daughter of Babylon." Moreover, Titus was not descended from Edom, who was under Israelite rule and therefore rejoiced at Israel's downfall. And so it is written in the book of Obadiah (v. 12), as well as "Rejoice and be glad, daughter of Edom" (Lamentations 4:21). For the shame that the Edomites caused Israel on the day that Jerusalem was captured and the sanctuary burned by the Babylonians, was more difficult than their troubles, as it says: "you should not have boasted on the day of his distress" (Obadiah 12).

Similarly, Ibn Ezra interprets other sources against Edom in a literal sense, but does not eschew discussing whether they might also apply to the future. He explains Amos 9:12 thus: "'in order that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations'—after Sanheriv's death. And the matter obviously refers to the Messiah."

Unlike Rashi and Ibn Ezra, who generally interpreted prophecies against Edom in their literal sense, and only occasionally referred to Israel's future redemption, Radak interprets every prophecy in the Hebrew Bible about Edom exclusively in terms of Rome and Christianity. In his commentary on Obadiah, for example, he discusses Edom's sin in terms of Rome's offenses during the destruction of the Second Temple. Radak writes at the beginning of his commentary on Obadiah:

> This prophecy concerns the Second Temple, when the Edomites inflicted harm upon Israel, as we interpreted in Amos' prophecy, "For three sins of Edom" (1:11). This prophet predicted that the Holy One, blessed be He, will repay them in the future, at the End of Days, when Israel returns from exile. Nowadays, the land of Edom is not Edom's for the nations have become mixed up, and most of them are either of the Christian faith or the Ishmaelites' faith, and it is unclear who is Edomite, Moabite, Ammonite or of other nations, for all have been exiled from their land and the nations have assimilated; Rome, however, were mostly Edomite. And when the prophets spoke of Edom's destruction at the End of Days, they spoke of Rome, as we interpreted regarding Isaiah's speech, "Draw near, O nations, to hear" (34:1): when Rome is destroyed, Israel will be redeemed. As Jeremiah stated in Lamentations, "The punishment of your iniquity, O daughter Zion, is accomplished, he will keep you in exile no longer; but your iniquity, O daughter Edom, he will punish" (4:22).

Radak treads an interesting path in his attempt to fuse the plain meaning of the text with his belief that the prophecies about Edom allude to the Romans who destroyed the Second Temple. He also explains the reason behind Rome's association with Edom. He alleges that the Edomites no longer dwell in the land of Edom because the nations were displaced and intermingled, and that in his own time, some dwell among the Ishmaelites, and others among the Christians. He claims that initially, however, most of the inhabitants of Edom made their way to Rome, and therefore interprets every biblical prediction of Edom's destruction as a reference to Rome. Radak is consistent in his approach and even interprets references to Edom as an allusion to Rome when the source is devoid of any messianic undertones. This is most salient in Amos 1:11. He unfailingly reads the various sources in this sense and even contends that Ps 137:7 alludes to Rome, despite the fact that v. 8 refers explicitly to Babylon. Adhering to the Midrash, he even ascribes the mention of Edom in Lamentations, which describes the first destruction, to the Roman's destruction of the Second Temple:

> While he was prophesying about the Babylonian exile, he was inspired by the divine spirit and saw the exile following the destruction of the Second Temple, by Edom, for the destroyer Titus was Roman, who was "Edomite." Likewise, when prophesying about the Babylonian exile in Lamentations, Jeremiah saw the destruction of the Second Temple, and said: "Rejoice and be glad, daughter of Edom'—as a warning, as in

> "Rejoice, young man, while you are young" [Ecclesiastes 11:9]. And our Sages, of Blessed memory, said: "Daughter of Edom"—this is Caesarea, "who dwells in the land of Uz,"—this is Rome.

R. Isaac Abrabanel went in a similar direction, and devoted an entire book to this subject, entitled *Mashmi'a Yeshu'a*, "Proclaimer of Salvation." This was a compendium of all the biblical sources about the future redemption and the messianic era. In the introduction, he denounces the Christians and Muslims who do not interpret passages about Israel's redemption in a literal sense. This is followed by furious criticism of Jewish exegetes who interpret prophetic sources as references to the Second Temple, rather than to the End of Days. He refers to those who interpreted these passages as descriptions of the messianic era as "pleasant," while members of the former group are "sabotage" (an allusion to the names of Zechariah's two staffs, 11:7). To quote his harsh words:

> The sages of our people who follow God's Torah and keep His covenant follow two paths in exegesis; one I called "Pleasant," and the other "Sabotage."
>
> The first interpreted the prophecies in their true sense, pleasant to behold, a celebration of holiness; what was before, and what shall be . . . they interpreted everything in their right time; these are the ones who have faith in God, and await Him.
>
> But from the dens of lions, from the mountains of leopards . . . people who believe themselves sages—people who are technically Jewish, but betrayers of the light, shepherds of fools—claim that the prophecies and psalms refer to, and were fulfilled, at the time of the Second Temple, when our cattle were heavy, our camps ringing and our banners waving with song and dance, and that our belief in the coming of our Messiah is not alluded to in the holy writings, but rather, has been declared by later sages. And they dare write about this, shamelessly. . .
>
> [He then accuses certain people of being] slanderous spies [an allusion to the spies in Numbers who badmouthed the land] who misrepresent the prophetic writings, whose eyes are blind to the true intentions of the visionaries. . . . Ibn Ezra is guilty of this crime in his interpretation of some prophecies, but not all.
>
> Many have fallen victim to these futile interpretations, and we have witnessed many losing faith in the coming of the Messiah. Many Jews of simple faith have been discouraged, startled, but fail to do anything about the outrageous lies of these destructive exegetes. . .
>
> Let me challenge them with words:
>
> Understand, O dullest of the people, and fools: if I cannot believe that the prophets–so close to the Lord, sons of God–wrote about the future redemption, then who *shall* I believe? Shall angels appear to me in dreams;

shall fiery messengers show me visions of the future, of a raven-headed warrior slicing off the shoots, the foes and enemies; of strength returning to those who await the Lord. . . . Who has taught this lore of redemption to the sages, if not the prophets? From where else could they have learned of future redemption—from the mouths of babes, of fools, of drunkards? From who else but the prophets, who were privy to God's secrets and anointed to bring good tidings to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to announce that God shall save you, and bestow abundance upon you. . .and that each shall return to his own land. . . .

These wily, misleading foxes—what wisdom have they? How dare they dabble in the secrets of prophecy; who are these youngsters, and what do they understand?

Who are their adversaries? Wise ones! The Sages of the Mishnah and Talmud, valiant men, cornerstones of the Torah, who have proven that the future redemption is recorded in the Holy writings; they have unearthed the text's treasures, revealed its delights . . . exegetes such as Jonathan the son of Uziel, keeper of the faith, righteous Rashi, the wise son of Kimhi [Radak] . . . true exegetes who have traced indications in the text proving that God's salvation is yet to come, and God has yet to act in vengeance for His people; yet to seek revenge against His enemies; yet to hold a rich feast.

The Abrabanel's exceptionally acerbic words must be considered in their own historical context. Abrabanel wrote his book in Monopoli, after he had been expelled from Spain in 1492, and completed it on the 26th of February in the year 1498, 5 years after his expulsion. This was a period of intense loneliness, displacement, and destitution for the once esteemed, prosperous scholar. At the age of 58 years, he felt old, weak, and abandoned.[24] His three works about redemption, *ma'ayenei hayeshua* ("The Wellsprings of Salvation"), *yeshu'at meshiho* ("The Salvation of His Anointed"), and *mashmia' yeshu'a* ("Proclaimer of Redemption"), were written to encourage the refugees whose world had come crashing down around them. In his introduction to *mashmia' yeshu'a*, quoted above, Abrabanel opens with the Muslim and Christian belief that Israel will not be saved. The Inquisition was driven by Christian theology, and the annihilation of Spanish Jewry enfeebled the entire diasporic nation. Abrabanel offered hope of a Jewish Messiah as an alternative to Christian supremacy, and he became deeply immersed in the idea of his people's impending salvation.[25] The dream of redemption was more palpable in the dark years following the Inquisition, and Abrabanel openly argued with Christian beliefs. A central

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24. B. Netanyahu, *Don Isaac Abravanel: Statesman and Philosopher* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1972), 75. Similarly, E. Lawee, *Isaac Abarbanel's Stance toward Tradition: Defense, Dissent, and Dialogue* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001), 129.

25. Netanyahu, *Abravanel*, 75–79. See in depth Lawee, *Isaac Abarbanel*, 127–68.

concept in the theology he mapped out was that prophecies of redemption in the Bible refer to a future epoch. Exegetes who stated that these prophecies referred to the Return to Zion and the Second Temple period were, in his eyes, inviting catastrophe and despair because to bury these visions in the past was disheartening the nation and depriving them of hope for the future:[26]

> Many have fallen victim to these futile interpretations, and we have witnessed many losing faith in the coming of the Messiah. Many Jews of simple faith have been discouraged, startled, but fail to do anything about the outrageous lies of these destructive exegetes.

For Abrabanel, the prophecies against Edom were more relevant than ever before. The existential need to seek consolation in the words of the prophets, and the hope that Christian evil, epitomized in the gruesome horrors of the Spanish Inquisition, would be avenged, was an inextricable part of his insistence that the biblical prophecies of doom against Edom alluded to the future destruction of Rome and Christianity. Naturally, he interpreted Obadiah's oracle as the fate awaiting the Roman and Christian Empires. It is intriguing, however, that Abrabanel did not claim that the prophet prophesied exclusively against Israel's future enemies, Rome and Christianity, but rather that his words apply equally to the ancient nation of Edom and to later events during the destruction of the Second Temple, as well as to the atrocities committed by the Christians:[27]

> And as I interpreted in the book *Mashmi'a Yeshu'a*, not only does the prophecy refer to the land of Edom, next to the land of Israel, but the prophet also refers to the nations that branched out over the entire world, namely the Christian religion, who are descended from the Edomites.

Throughout Jewish history, Edom has symbolized all who seek to destroy the Jews, all who compete with them for the status of chosen nation. Originally, the Edomites themselves were perceived as rivals; then the Roman Empire took on the mantle of Edom, and finally, this title was awarded to the Christians, who trampled and oppressed Jews in their conviction that they had become the new chosen nation. Thus has the extraordinary development of an ancient biblical concept evolved, over the generations, into an intricate discourse of election, rejection, and heritage.

26. Don Isaac Abrabanel, *Mashmiaʿ yeshuaʿ*, *Perush ʾal neviʾim u-khetuvim* (Tel Aviv: Abarbanel, 1960), 425–606.
27. Ibid.,111.

Afterword

The relationship between Jacob and Esau, Edom and Israel, is a fascinating biblical *topos*, woven like a thread throughout the story of Israel's history; from the dawn of their being, before Israel becomes a nation, until the destruction of the temple and Judah's exile. The destruction of Edom even plays a significant role in accounts of the nation's future redemption. Jacob and Esau are twin brothers, and this motif seems to reflect certain historical realities, such as the two nations' close linguistic and religious affinities. This element of brotherhood seems to inform the positive legal attitude toward Edom in the book of Deuteronomy, which forbids the abhorrence of the Edomite, as well as the divine command to refrain from military conflict with Edom prior to Israel's arrival in Canaan. Alongside, or rather following, this positive connection between the brother nations, the hostility reflected between Edom and Israel in later prophetic sources is notably more caustic than Israel's attitude toward other neighboring nations. Although the conflict between Israel and Aram or Philistia, for example, was ongoing and vicious, the enmity toward Edom was in another league altogether. The depth of hatred toward them, and the intensity and frequency of anti-Edomite sources in the Hebrew Bible, is incomparable to prophecies against any other nation.

The narrative of Jacob and Esau in the book of Genesis already focuses on the conflict between the brothers, which begins with the two unborn children struggling in their mother's womb. The story continues with the differences between them, Jacob's purchase of the birthright from his ravenous brother, and Jacob's theft of the blessing Isaac promises to Esau. Tension between them persists until the brothers part ways for good. This marks the end of Isaac's story, as well as Jacob's. The struggle between the brothers hinges mainly on the question of which twin is to inherit their father's legacy. All the characters in the story—Isaac, Rebecca, Esau, and Jacob—are motivated, to some degree, by this underlying question. Unlike the divine intervention that unequivocally determines that Isaac alone will inherit Abraham, God takes a passive stance in the conflict between Esau and Jacob. While God immediately informs Abraham that "it is through Isaac that offspring shall be named for you," in the next generation God remains silent until the second revelation to Jacob in Bethel, upon his return from Haran. God clearly allows this struggle to unfold: when Abraham and Sarah differ on the subject of Ishmael's fate, God immediately intervenes, but does not do so when Isaac and Rebecca each favor a different son. As a result, Rebecca eventually initiates an act that

leads to Isaac's deception. The conflict between the twins is clearly the subject of Isaac's story as well as Jacob's: once the issue is resolved, both patriarchs step aside and allow a new story, the story of Joseph and his brothers, to dominate the stage.

Moreover, Jacob's winding narrative focuses mainly on the question whether he is the chosen son. This first arises with the story of his purchase of the birthright, and again when he steals the blessing. Once he has fled the country, the narrative is deeply concerned with his return to Canaan and to his father's house, as is evident from the narrative's structure and continual dialogue with the story of Jacob's departure to Haran. Jacob's chosen status is only confirmed on his reunion with Isaac before his death, when Esau has already settled in Mount Seir.

Intriguingly, the book of Genesis provides no clear reason for Jacob's selection or Esau's exclusion. Later sources, such as the Apocrypha and midrashic literature, provide countless descriptions of Jacob's virtue and Esau's unworthiness, but such explicit, judgmental material is virtually absent in the actual narrative of Genesis. Although the story's readers seem to have garnered the general impression that the narrative perceives Jacob in a positive light, while Esau is rejected, this absence of categorical resolution has dramatic potential implications for the history that later develops between the two nations.

The people interpreted the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem and their ensuing exile as signs of God's rejection, and a breach of the covenant between them. The Edomites spitefully contributed to Judah's destruction and then seized parts of their territory. Israel's hostility toward Edom initially stemmed from Edom's grave offenses against them, but with time, these violations became weighted with theological significance; the memory of Edom's mocking laughter stung more sharply than Judah's slowly healing wounds. The people began to suspect that Edom had supplanted them as God's chosen nation. Jacob feared that his departure from Canaan, while Esau remained behind, was a sign of his rejection; this fear was not quenched until he returned to the land and was blessed by God. Now, Israel was exiled from their land while the Edomites began to infiltrate southern Judah; this was interpreted as a sign that the birthright had reverted to the elder son. The historical rivalry between Judah and Edom was read as a continuation of the ancient struggle between Jacob and Esau. Once, Jacob had prevailed; now, it seemed, Esau had finally gained the upper hand.

The struggle between Edom and Israel was not a struggle like any other. The tension between the two brother nations was profoundly connected to Israel's sense of self-identity. The prospect of redemption—and the people's consolation—depended not only on Judah's rehabilitation but on Edom's destruction. To this effect, prophets screamed themselves hoarse about the doom that awaited Edom—not only for its actual offenses against Judah but for the sake of the people's psychological state, promising Edom's

destruction as a preliminary stage of Judah's impending redemption. Just as Esau competed with Jacob for the rank of chosen son, Edom, in Israel's eyes, were rivals for the rank of chosen nation.

Edom was originally perceived not as a symbol of evil but as a "brother" to Israel, a brother whose proximity to Judah eventually posed a threat to the nation. I intend not to downplay the gravity of their crimes against the nation but rather to claim that their actual offenses were not what posed the greatest threat. Many nations could have been rendered into a symbol of evil for their sins against Israel, including Edom. But only Edom threated Israel's very sense of identity, and challenged the perception that they were indeed God's chosen nation.

The same fear lies at the heart of Rome and Christianity's association with the nation of Edom. Rome also perceived itself as the chosen nation, and was therefore considered a rival for Judah's status as God's people. Moreover, Rome destroyed the Second Temple, challenging Judah's status as the chosen nation, so that the restoration of Judah's pride was dependent on Rome's downfall. The Roman's belief in their divine election made them the perfect subjects for interpellation of the biblical hostility against Edom.

With the Christianization of the Roman Empire, the association with Edom became even more relevant. Christianity explicitly claimed that it had supplanted Judaism as the chosen religion. With its monotheistic faith rooted in the Bible, Christianity was certainly a "brother" to the Jewish religion. Just as postexilic Judah feared Edom as their rivals for the status of chosen nation, Christianity essentially constructed itself as an alternative faith to Judaism, and claimed that God's favor had passed from traditional Jews to Christians. The prophecies about Edom's destruction and the need for ratification that Israel, not Edom, was the chosen nation, became more relevant than ever. Medieval exegetes armed themselves with sources about the fall of Edom in the polemic struggle against Christianity.

The history of the struggle between Jacob and Esau, Edom and Israel, is an integral part of Israel's sense of self-identity as the chosen nation. Over the generations, various entities claimed this same status, challenging Israel's self-perception. This is what lies beneath Israel's struggle against Edom. Similar rivalry also existed between Judeans and Samaritans, Judah and Rome, and Jews and Christians. Identity is not constructed in a vacuum; it is formed in relation to the Other, through the definition of who is and who is not a part of a nation, through negation, elimination and appropriation. In this context, we can fully understand the words of Malachi: "I have loved Jacob, but Esau I despised."

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Deuterocanonical Literature

IDENTITY in CONFLICT

No nation has been subjected to a wider range of biblical attitudes and emotions than Edom. In some sources, Edom is perceived as Israel's brother; in many others, the animosity toward Edom is tremendous. The book of Genesis introduces Isaac, his wife Rebecca, and their twin sons, Esau and Jacob. Rivalry between the brothers emerges even before their birth and escalates over the course of their lives. The question of which son should be favored also causes tension in the parents' relationship, and most of the Genesis text concerning Isaac and Rebecca revolves around this issue. The narrative describes the fraternal conflict between Jacob and Esau at length, and many hold that this description is a reflection of the hostility between Edom and Israel. However, the relationship between the brothers is not always depicted as strained.

The twofold relationship between the brothers in Genesis—brotherhood and fraternity coupled with hatred and rivalry—introduces a dichotomy that is retained throughout the Hebrew Bible. In this monograph, Assis elucidates the complex relationship between Edom and Israel reflected in the Bible, to attempt to clarify the source of this complexity and the function that this relationship serves in the various biblical texts and Israel's early history. He shows how this relationship plays an important role in the formation of Israel's identity, and how the historical interaction between the nations influenced the people's theological conception, as reflected in prophetic literature, poetry, and biblical narrative.

Prof. Elie Assis is the dean of the Faculty of Jewish Studies at Bar-Ilan University, Tel Aviv, Israel. His deep passion for Bible study and teaching is reflected in his many publications (more than 40 articles on biblical narrative, poetry, and late prophecy, as well as 8 books) and his extensive speaking tours in Asia, Europe, and North America.



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